

ALFRED  
**HITCHCOCK's**  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

December, 1990 \$2.25 U.S./\$2.75 Can.



**A SOUL  
TO TELL**

A New  
John Francis  
Cuddy Story  
by Jeremiah  
Healy

AND MORE  
NEW STORIES  
OF MYSTERY  
AND SUSPENSE



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



0075 \$19.95/\$7.98



3376 \$18.95/\$7.98



0034 \$18.95/\$7.98



3293 \$17.95/\$7.98

# Get away with MURDER!

(6 books for 99¢ with membership)

It's *easy* to make a killing with *Mystery Guild*. First, slip the sharpest scissors out of the drawer. Then, ever so quietly, cut out the coupon below. Finish it off with a pen (caution: do *not* use invisible ink). Tonight, you can start slashing 40%-60% off publishers' prices. Become a partner in crime with *Mystery Guild*!



3368 \$19.95/\$7.98



6544 \$17.95/\$7.98



1495 \$18.95/\$7.98



\*1990 \$17.95/\$6.98



2600 \$16.95/\$7.98



2089 \$18.95/\$7.98



6569 \$18.95/\$7.98



6551 \$17.95/\$7.98

## HERE'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU JOIN...

**6 BOOKS FOR 99¢—PLUS A FREE CLUB TOTE.** Send no money now. You'll be billed 99¢, plus shipping and handling, when your membership is accepted.

**A GUARANTEE OF SATISFACTION.** If you're not 100% satisfied with your books, return them within 10 days at *our expense*. Your membership will be canceled and you'll owe nothing. The Club Tote is your free gift to keep.

**THE FREE CLUB MAGAZINE.** You'll receive 14 issues a year. Each issue includes the Featured Selection(s) plus a number of Alternates—some exclusive Club editions. Twice a year, you may also receive offers of Special Selections.

**SHOPPING MADE SIMPLE.** To get the Featured Selection(s), *do nothing*—it will be sent automatically. If you prefer another book—or none at all—simply return your Member Reply Form by the date shown. A shipping and handling charge is added to each order.

**AN EASY-TO-MEET OBLIGATION.** Take up to 1 year to buy 4 more books at regular low Club

prices. Afterwards, you may resign membership anytime. Or you may continue to enjoy the benefits of belonging to *Mystery Guild*.

**HUGE DISCOUNTS...** from 40% to 60% off publishers' hardcover editions. Club books are sometimes altered in size to fit special presses.

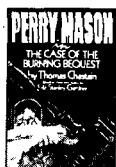
**RISK-FREE RETURN PRIVILEGES.** If you get an unwanted book because your Club magazine came late and you had less than 10 days to decide, simply return the book at *our expense*.

Prices in fine print are for publishers' editions. Prices in bold print are for Club hardcover editions.

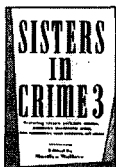
x Hardcover edition exclusively for Club members  
• Explicit scenes and/or language



**FREE TOTE**  
with membership



9100 \$15.95/\$7.98



2055 \$8.98x



0083 \$17.95/\$8.98



2998 \$15.95/\$8.98



\*2667 \$18.95/\$10.98



\*2626 \$19.95/\$11.98



2220 \$16.95/\$8.98



9126 \$17.95/\$10.98



\*9878 \$19.95/\$11.98



2725 \$17.95/\$8.98



\*3244 \$21.95/\$12.98



3061 \$16.95/\$7.98



9110 \$17.95/\$8.98



0091 \$15.95/\$7.98



7385 \$8.98x



0729 \$7.98x



3228 \$17.95/\$7.98



0109 \$14.95/\$8.98



0117 \$18.95/\$10.98



0133 \$14.95/\$8.98



\*0166 \$18.95/\$10.98



0174 \$17.95/\$8.98



2428 \$18.95/\$7.98



\*1966 \$17.95/\$7.98

# MYSTERY®

## GUILD

OVER 40 YEARS OF  
THE WORLD'S GREATEST MYSTERIES

**YES!** Please enroll me in *Mystery Guild* according to the risk-free membership plan described in this ad. Send me the 6 BOOKS I've indicated—plus my FREE CLUB TOTE. Bill me just 99¢, plus shipping and handling.

Mr./Mrs.  
Miss/Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

please print

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

17329

35

If you're under 18, your parent must sign here \_\_\_\_\_

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members serviced from Canada, where offer is slightly different. Sales tax added where applicable. We reserve the right to reject any application.

AHM 12/90

MAIL TO:

*Mystery Guild*  
6550 East 30th Street  
P.O. Box 6362  
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6362

Please write book  
numbers here:


# CONTENTS



## SHORT STORIES

<b>DEATH BY AUCTION</b> by Sherrard Gray	<b>8</b>
<b>PEARLS FROM HEAVEN</b> by Gregor Robinson	<b>25</b>
<b>MEDUSA IN MOURNING</b> by Marianne Strong	<b>40</b>
<b>FUN AND GAMES AT THE WHACKS MUSEUM</b> by Elliott Capon	<b>62</b>
<b>A SOUL TO TELL</b> by Jeremiah Healy	<b>74</b>
<b>THE ONLY GOOD UMPIRE</b> by Reynolds Phillips	<b>94</b>
<b>CUT AND RUN</b> by Dan Crawford	<b>110</b>

## MYSTERY CLASSIC

<b>THE MOTHER OF THE DETECTIVE</b> by G. D. H. and M. Cole	<b>142</b>
--	------------

## DEPARTMENTS

<b>GUEST EDITORIAL</b> by Mary Cannon	<b>4</b>
<b>THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>UNSOLVED</b> by Guy Savant	<b>92</b>
<b>SOLUTION TO THE NOVEMBER "UNSOLVED"</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>BOOKED &amp; PRINTED</b> by Carol Harper	<b>148</b>
<b>MURDER BY DIRECTION</b> by William Heller	<b>152</b>
<b>THE STORY THAT WON</b>	<b>155</b>

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 35, No. 12, December, 1990. Published every 28 days with special issues in October and at year end, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$2.25 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.75 in Canada. Annual subscription \$31.97 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$35.50 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 7055, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office. Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1990 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Change of Address to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 7055, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. In Canada return to 1801 South Cameron, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3E1.

ISSN: 0002-5224.

Cover by Mark Fresh

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# How to raise a child on \$12 a month

Here in America \$12 a month will not even pay for school lunches. But overseas, \$12 will work a miracle.

For example, please take a close look at little Larni. Twelve dollars a month can change her life forever.

... a life spent in a wooden shack, built on stilts, over a disease-infested swamp. And at night she gets a bowl of rice to eat and goes to sleep on a floor mat.

Her only toys are a worn-out teddy bear and a ragged doll. Her secondhand dress is patched and too small for her. She desperately needs a better diet to build strong bones, medicine when she is sick, water that is not contaminated and a chance to go to school.

And all this can happen for only \$12 a month!

Will you help raise a child like Larni?

This is a full sponsorship program—designed for Americans who are unable to send \$20, \$21, or even \$22 a month to other sponsorship organizations.

## Here's what you will receive:

- a 3½" x 5" photograph of the child you are helping.
- two personal letters from your child each year.
- a complete Sponsorship Kit with your child's case history.

And if you wish, you can send the child you are helping special birthday and Christmas cards.

## Here's what your child will receive:

- emergency food, clothing and medical care.
- a chance to attend school.
- help for the child's family and community with counseling on housing, agriculture, nutrition and other vital areas.

## Will you help raise a child?

Here's how you can become a sponsor:

1. Fill out the coupon and tell us if you wish to sponsor a boy or a girl and select the country of your choice.
2. Or better yet, just mark an "X" in the "Emergency List" box, and we will assign a child to you who most urgently needs your love.
3. Mail the coupon and your first \$12 monthly payment to Children International.

And then in just a few days, you will receive your child's name, photograph and case history. And you will be on your way to an exciting adventure.

May we hear from you?



*At nightfall, Larni eats her bowl of rice and sleeps on a floor mat. She lives in a wooden shack, built on stilts, over a disease-infested swamp.*

## Sponsorship Application KTA&E

- ☐ Yes, I wish to sponsor a child. Enclosed is my first payment of \$12. Please assign me a ☐ Boy ☐ Girl
- Country preference: ☐ India ☐ The Philippines ☐ Thailand  
☐ Chile ☐ Honduras ☐ Dominican Republic ☐ Colombia  
☐ Guatemala ☐ Ecuador ☐ Holy Land Child

☐ OR, choose a child who most needs my help from your EMERGENCY LIST.

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE  ZIP

☐ Please send me more information about sponsoring a child.

☐ I can't sponsor a child now, but wish to make a contribution of \$

Please forward your U.S. tax-deductible check, made payable to:

## Children International.

Joseph Gripkey, President  
 2000 East Red Bridge Road • Box 419413  
 Kansas City, Missouri 64141

*A worldwide organization serving children since 1936.  
 Financial report readily available upon request.*

# GUEST EDITORIAL

by  
*Mary Cannon*

**W**hen I appeared several months ago in these pages as Guest Editor, it was to relate my impressions of a recent weekend spent at Malice Domestic, the fan convention organized for the writers and readers of the "domestic" mystery. Now I'm back to chat away about yet another fan gathering. And have I mentioned that I've already reserved my place for Bouchercon in London this fall? Just think of me as AHMM's roving reporter, the fan-on-the-scene. You have my permission to turn green with envy. It's a tough job, but someone . . . well, you know.

The First Annual Midwest Mystery and Suspense Convention took place in Omaha the weekend of May 25-27, and at the end a crowd of more than three hundred fifty authors and fans voted resoundingly to "see

you next year!" Like the larger and older Bouchercon and like Malice Domestic, the Midwest convention featured panels of authors, a banquet with awards, scheduled author signings, a dealers' room, souvenir T-shirts, and lots of opportunities for fans and authors to mingle in the bar, the lounge, the pool, and the hallways. Non-convention guests in the habit of eavesdropping surely must have wondered at overheard conversations about the disposal of bodies, fast-acting poisons, and the like. (There were fewer costumes in evidence than are to be seen at Malice Domestic, but just the sight of folks groaning under the weight of books is—in this day and age—worthy of remark.)

The panel on Friday evening titled "The Accidental Detective" set the tone of fun with comments from authors M.D.

**Cathleen Jordan**, Editor; **Holly Wallinger**, Managing Editor; **Judy Downer**, Assistant Editor; **Terri Czczko**, Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Associate Art Director; **Nancy Siwinski**, Junior Designer; **Carole Dixon**, Production Director; **Cynthia Manson**, Director of Marketing and Subsidiary Rights; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts and Permissions; **Elizabeth Beatty**, Circulation Director; **Brian McKeon**, Corporate Business Manager; **Christian Dorbandt**, Newsstand Marketing and Promotion Manager; **Dennis Jones**, Newsstand Operations Manager; **Veena Raghavan**, Director, Special Projects; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Judy Dorman**, Advertising Coordinator.  
(New York: 212-557-9100.)

**Joel Davis**, President and Publisher; **Joe DeFalco**, Vice President, Finance; **Carl Barte**, Vice President, Manufacturing; **A. Bruce Chatterton**, Publisher.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Who Killed Winston Philips?

**O**n October 3, 1990 there is going to be a murder. The long illustrious life of billionaire Winston Philips will suddenly be ended. But who will be responsible for this treachery? Each suspect has a viable motive that could lead him, or her, to the ultimate crime. The list of suspects is lengthy. Is it:

**Sylvester Cameron, Winston's brother-in-law and business associate?**

– *Winston was about to expose an inside stock trading scandal he was involved in.*

**Joseph Roth, a frequent visitor to the mansion?**

– *The talk is that he is spending quite a lot of time with Winston's young wife, Gloria.*

**Fritz Weaver, Winston's former partner?**

– *He once was Winston's business partner but lost millions on a poor investment suggested by Winston. Now he's the mansion's gardener.*

**Jennifer Weaver, Fritz's daughter?**

– *She was accused of pandering with Winston's son David and banished from the household.*

**Gloria Philips, Winston's unfaithful young wife?**

– *The housekeeper says that Winston was getting rather tight with her allowance.*

**David Philips, Winston's spoiled son?**

– *He has an eye on his portion of the inheritance and might be keeping a personal secret.*

**Matilda Genevese, Winston's secretary?**

– *She knows where the bodies are buried. Is her affluent lifestyle being financed by blackmail?*

**Doris Cameron, Winston's sister and Sylvester's neglected wife?**

– *She's still in love with her unfaithful husband. Would she let her brother ruin him?*

**FIVE** people who solve the crime and provide the necessary information will  
**EACH WIN \$1000 CASH!** Here's how to play the newest most exciting  
mystery game ever:

Call the **MYSTERY HOTLINE** at

**1-900-535-2900 PROGRAM #310** (before Winston's demise)

for complete game details and information on how to receive a free entry form. Then, call the hotline every day and receive a new set of clues (or red herrings). You'll hear the actual suspects describe their relationship with Winston, what they were doing the night he was murdered and why he or she didn't do it. Forensic information and background details will be provided by the detective assigned to the case, Bill Huskin. If you miss any clues or wish to see written testimony, the Mystery Hotline will explain what to do.

**Solve WHO KILLED WINSTON PHILIPS?**

**AND YOU COULD WALK AWAY WITH \$1000!**

VOID WHERE PROHIBITED BY LAW

\$2.00/min.

Lake, and Yvonne Montgomery.

Montgomery's yet-unpublished sequel to *Scavengers* features a woman carpenter. "I can believe that as you renovate those old houses you will find bodies," she quipped. Lake is a professor at a midwestern university whose detective is a female campus cop. He admitted that there are "few bodies on campus," but earnestly promised "to rectify that. There *should* be more bodies."

"The Hometown P.I." the next day was jammed with the many fans of authors Jeremiah Healy, John Lutz, David Everson, William J. Reynolds, and Michael Allegretto. Moderator Gary Niebuhr questioned the men about how close each character comes to its author, and how much research is involved in the writing. Lutz described his hero, Nudger, as follows: "If he drops his toast, it's jam side down, and that sort of thing does seem to happen to me." Reynolds noted that with each book the character of Nebraska has moved further away from his creator; he doesn't even agree with Nebraska in many instances any more. Healy confided that his P.I., Cuddy, is based on a composite of his father and an uncle. Everson is a professor of political science and the possessor of a quick and very dry wit. His answer to the

question about how much research he carries out was an admission: "I began writing mystery novels so that I don't *have* to do research any more."

The private eye in crime fiction was notably featured at Omaha, and many of its practitioners were in attendance and on panels. Jerry Kenneally, James E. Martin, Les Roberts, Robert F. Engleman, and Robert Randisi tackled the topic of "The Real and the Not So Real Private Eye." Lawrence Block, Rex Burns, Michael Collins, and Max Allan Collins all talked about "Writing More Than One Series Character," while Susan Kelly and Joe L. Hensley joined the panel discussing "Serial Killers." The Shamus Awards (sponsored by the Private Eye Writers of America) were handed out at the banquet as well, with Best Novel honors going to the absent Jonathan Valin for *Extenuating Circumstances* and Best First going to Karen Kijewski for *Katwalk*. Best Short Story was won by Mickey Spillane for "The Killing Man," and Best Paperback Original went to Rob Kantner for *Hell's Only Half Full*.

Clive Cussler was the Guest of Honor, so a panel centered around Cussler and other writers of adventure and suspense, including R. D. Zimmerman, Larry Bond, and David Morrell.

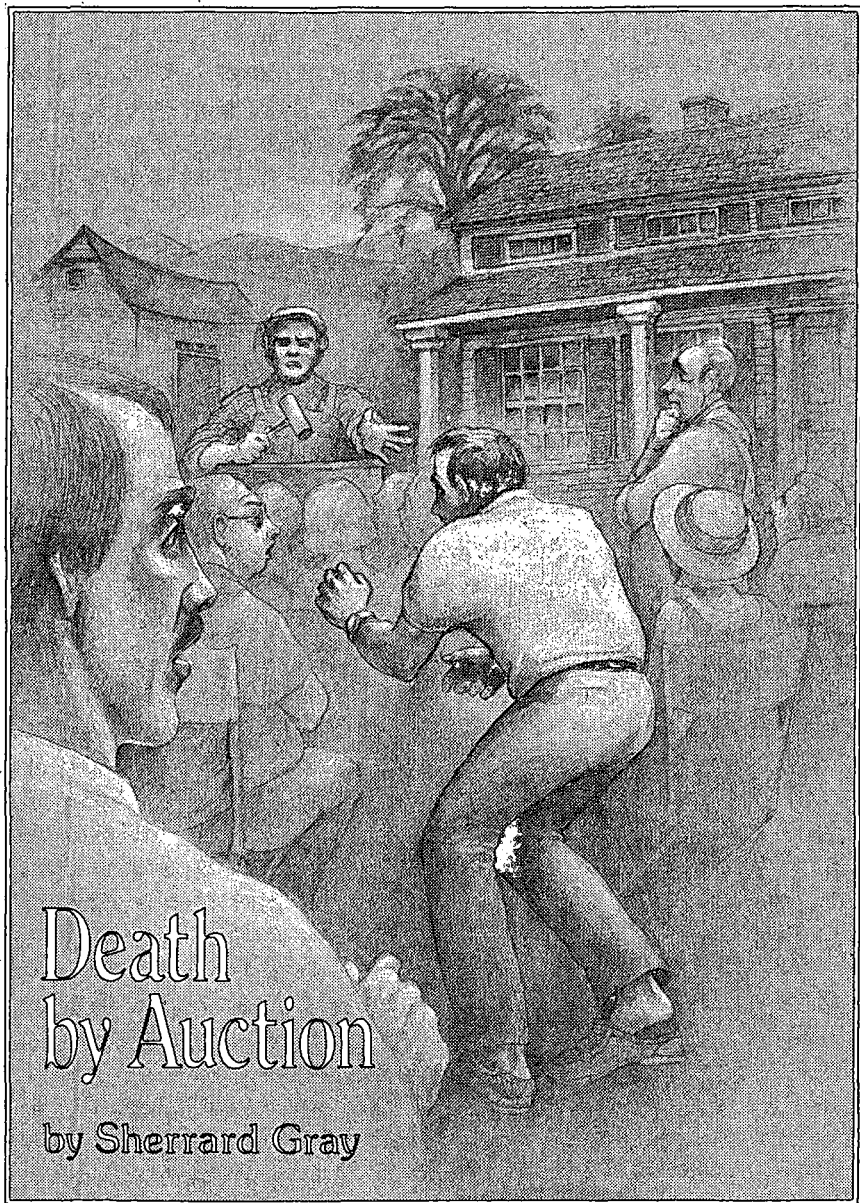
Authors Charlotte MacLeod, Nancy Pickard, Marlys Millhiser, Jan Grape, and Jean Hager explored "Surprise Endings," unanimously agreeing that "there is a very special place in a very special place" for reviewers or book jacket copywriters who give endings away. Edgar-winner Joan Lowery Nixon joined a panel discussing "Suspense Fiction for the Young Adult"; Francis M. Nevins discussed the work of Erle Stanley Gardner, and P. M. Carlson and Sharyn McCrumb were among authors who tackled "Little Old Ladies in Detective Fiction." Michael Bowen and Warwick Downing joined up to talk about "The Law vs. Sam Spade," while Barbara D'Amato and Doug Cummings discussed "The Investigative Reporter," and Carolyn G. Hart joined panelists talking about "The Journalist and the Mystery Writer."

One panel that played to a packed house was "Publishing Your First Mystery Novel." Marlys Millhiser had quipped earlier in the day that if "you scratch a fan you find a book proposal." The lively question and answer period that followed this panel seemed to bear her out. Moderated by Parnell Hall, the panel featured four first novelists: M. K. Loens, Karen Kijewski, Joseph Triggaboff, and Dianne Davidson. Joining them were literary

agent Dominick Abel, editor Brian Allen De Fiore, and Ballantine Books publisher Susan Petersen. The first novelists all urged would-be authors to keep the faith, while the publishing professionals—with perhaps less innocent enthusiasm—echoed the message. I silently applauded Dominick Abel when he cautioned that not all that is merely written will necessarily be publishable. Anyone who's ever had the job of reading a slush pile will testify to the truth of that.

There were no films or videos at Omaha, unlike the other conventions; and programming concluded at noon on Sunday rather than later in the day. Having attended all three major mystery conventions now, this reporter has noted some small differences among them. Bouchercon is wonderful and everyone is there, but it is also very huge and so it lacks some of the spontaneity and informality present in the two smaller conventions. Malice Domestic pays homage to the "domestic" mystery with real panache and wit, yet Omaha's attendees did seem to appreciate the opportunity also to discuss the young adult mystery, horror, thrillers, adventure espionage, and—of course—the private eye novel. Bouchercon is a moveable feast (not that  
*(continued on page 140)*





# Death by Auction

by Sherrard Gray

Illustration by Judy Mitchell

**B**unk Cummins, chief of the Elizabethtown Police Department, liked auctions. They were a chance to relax, get away from his official duties. Lots of people he knew milling around, hot dogs and soft drinks at a concession stand, the excitement of the bidding. The sun was having a hard time showing itself—minutes earlier a shower had sent some of the crowd running for cover—but the air was warm and there was a pleasant breeze. Of course, it was sad to watch all these old farms go to out-of-staters, to people who had never ploughed a furrow or milked a cow in their lives, but that's the way it was. You can't fight economic reality—unless you get off on beating your head against a wall.

So Bunk, in civvies, stood on the lawn and munched on a dog, washed it down with a Coke, and listened to the bidding. It looked like a man from Connecticut, Boone De Shields, was going to get the old Homer Dopp farm. One-hundred-forty-year-old house (looked it, too; whoever bought the place better not be skittish about writing checks), a red barn with a picturesque (but uneconomical) sag, seventy-five acres of pasture, hayland, and maplewood. The bidding had reached a hundred and forty thousand

dollars, and the second bidder, George Lefevre, was starting to look a little green around the gills. George owned the adjoining farm, and he and his son Arnold pastured their cows on the Dopp place, cut the hay. But a hundred and forty grand was apparently more than the Lefevres were prepared to shell out.

"One forty one forty one forty," chanted Clarence Sills, the auctioneer. "Do I hear forty-five . . . forty-five . . . forty-five?"

Clarence raised his gavel, ran through his spiel one last time, cried, "Going . . . going . . . gone!" and banged his little hammer down on the lectern.

Bunk was watching George Lefevre, noting his desolate look and feeling sorry for him. Someone gasped off to his right where De Shields was standing, another voice breathed, "Oh my God!" De Shields' knees were buckling, his eyes rolling. By the time the chief got to him he was face down on the grass. His pulse fluttered and went out. Bunk dropped his wrist and radioed for the Rescue Squad. He didn't think it was necessary to ask for another patrol car.

"Must've had a heart attack," said one of the bystanders. "Funny, though, that he would drop like that." The bystander's eyes widened as he saw what Bunk was looking at: a slow

ooze of blood through the back of the denim vest De Shields wore. "Crimus Mary, that warn't no heart attack!"

**I**t took Mrs. De Shields about a minute to get there. Last he saw her, she was standing on the front porch of the house, her pretty face scowling up at the sky. She had not stood with her husband during the bidding but had wandered around almost as though it had nothing to do with her. But now she came running over, her eyes fixed rigidly on her husband's body. Bunk had gently turned him over. Blood gushed from his chest. She knelt beside him.

"Roone . . . Is he . . ."

"I'm afraid so, Mrs. De Shields." Bunk heaved to his feet and started pushing the crowd back. Somewhere on the ground nearby, there was probably a lead slug and he wanted that slug. "Just move back, everyone. Please. And don't anyone leave. Not until I tell you to."

"Good going," said Bunk, putting a hand on Lieutenant Hanley's arm. Hanley had found the bullet hidden in the grass where De Shields had been standing. Hanley was not a bad cop, but he would probably never win a prize for his powers of observation. He was one of those

people who talk better than they perform. But he had gotten down on his hands and knees and poked around and found the thing. And then he had questioned two of the people standing near De Shields when he was shot and learned exactly which way De Shields was facing.

"Okay," he told Bunk, "exit wound below entry wound, looks like about a thirty-degree angle. I'd say the house, second floor. In fact, that window right there. See, it's open."

"All the windows on the second floor are open, Jeff."

Lieutenant Hanley squinted again at the second floor, shrugged, and started waving his arms. "All right, folks, now step back. Come on, Guy, that means you, too." Guy Blodgett, who was vying for the role of town drunk, stared at him with eyes that looked like sunsets and moved aside. "Make way for the medical examiner," went on Lieutenant Hanley, shooing people back. "Let's go, move it!"

Bunk went over to the widow, who was slumped in a folding chair. A friend of hers, Lucy Throckmorton, sat next to her with an arm around her shoulder. Bunk knew Lucy slightly. Her husband had made a bundle in real estate and moved up here more or less retired at the age of forty. "I don't think she

wants to talk now," whispered Lucy. "Shock."

Bunk waited and finally Jean De Shields looked up, but there was no awareness in her face, no recognition.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. De Shields. Truly sorry. Can you tell me anything? Do you have any idea what happened?"

"No," she breathed, and turned away.

"She's staying with us, Mr. Cummins," said Lucy. "Perhaps you could interview her there at a later time?"

"Sure." He walked away. During the next hour he and Lieutenant Hanley, two Gilman County sheriff's deputies, and two Elizabethville patrolmen interviewed and got the names and addresses of all seventy-five people present. About half were from Elizabethville and Colleytown, others from as far away as Montpelier and Burlington, and some even from Canada, Maine, Connecticut. There was a man from Connecticut, a Leonard Strachey, who said he once worked in the same real estate office in Hartford as the deceased. Said he was up here on vacation when he ran across an auction notice and drove over. Bunk thought this was a bit of coincidence but then the guy hadn't entered the bidding, so what motive could he possibly have? He took one

more look at Strachey in his Lacoste shirt and Gucci loafers and thought, If this guy's a killer, then I'm an alien from outer space.

None of the people they interviewed had heard a shot, no one had seen a rifle barrel poking out of a window or a figure slinking suspiciously out of the house. Bunk and Hanley went upstairs and, sure enough, found fresh powder burns on the windowsill. But no weapon. They searched the house and grounds and finally had to let everyone go.

The cars and pickups, vans, hay trucks, motorcycles were parked away from the house along the dirt road. "I was standing right here when it happened," said Lockwood Beal, "and no one snuck that rifle into their vehicle." Sixteen years ago Lockwood and Bunk had graduated together from Kellogg Union. Lock was a diesel mechanic, an avid fisherman, and, like Bunk, a Little League umpire. The chief supposed that if he had a friend outside of police personnel, that friend was Lock. "In fact, no one went near their rig. That rifle's still here somewhere—unless the killer ate it or the thing just dissolved. I've seen some queer things in my day, but I'm not quite willing to admit a rifle can vanish into thin air."



"Yeah," said Bunk, watching the vehicles leave. A BSA motorcycle revved up, and a young couple in black helmets and leather jackets roared by. He watched a few more vehicles pull out onto the road, started to walk toward the house where two men from the state's mobile crime van were dusting for prints, and stopped.

"Something wrong?" Lock shifted the snuff in his mouth.

"I don't know. It's nothing, I guess." He didn't tell Lockwood, but something hadn't been quite right about the way those cars and trucks drove off. Some little detail stuck in his craw, but damned if he could pull it out. And then he knew why not, and it was the oldest and probably saddest problem in the books. Known as personal. Cop having problems at home can't concentrate one hundred percent on the job.

"Coffee?" Heather's smile was skin-deep.

"Sure." He almost added, "honey," but decided not to push his luck. The last time he'd called her honey he had gotten a sarcastic smile, and that had stung more than a slap in the face. In fact, her strained smile now, as she asked if he wanted coffee, hurt. Her asking him if he wanted coffee

hurt. She was being careful, walking on eggs. Before it had been laughter, wisecracks, say what you want. She hadn't called him a "big jerk" in over two months. Maybe it was time to have it out.

"Heather," he said when she set his mug down on the kitchen table, "what's wrong?"

"Wrong?" His wife looked surprised—or tried to.

"Come on, kiddo. You've been treating me like a stranger all summer. For fifteen years we're like buddies and then all of a sudden there's ten yards of air between us. That's what's wrong. Honey."

When he finished, Heather was looking through a window at the small Cape house next door. The two Bishop kids, Joey and Kevin, were hitting ground balls to each other, practicing up for the start of the Little League playoffs in three days. She turned back and her eyes were filmy. "It's you, Bunk. You're bored. Bored with Elizabethville and with your job. Bored with your wife and two kids. Mostly, I think, with me."

"Aw, come on. How can you say that?" But even while he was denying it a queasy feeling told him it was true. He'd been having the is-this-all? blues. The worst part about it was that he knew he loved her, loved his kids, liked the town



in which they lived, and a good part of the time liked his job. Still, was this all there was? Those hungry boyhood dreams, those soaring fantasies, those shivers of joy at just being alive . . . Is this what they boiled down to? A chipped coffee mug in a two bedroom ranch house that needed a new furnace and a new roof. Two wonderful kids—but one of them needed braces at three grand a shot and the other was dyslectic. A scared wife. And a messy, unsolved — and maybe unsolvable — murder.

“Hi, Mr. Chief of Police.”

Lucy Throckmorton, wearing bluejeans and a shortsleeved blouse, was working in her rose garden. She was a thick-bodied woman with an intelligent, pleasant face. “Gosh, that sounds stilted. Can I call you just Mr. Cummins?”

“Okay with me.”

“You’re probably here to see Jean, aren’t you?”

“How’s she doing?”

“Much better. The service for Roone was yesterday. A lot of family and friends came up, and that helped enormously. She’s still not over the shock, of course, and probably never will be completely, but I saw her smile this morning and that

did my heart good. The only problem is, Mr. Cummins, she’s not here. Said she wanted to go for a dip at the Town Beach. I think you’ll find her there.”

As soon as Bunk pulled into the beach parking lot and climbed out of his car, he knew he should have waited for Jean—De Shields to go back to the Throckmortons’ to interview her. This was not the right setting. Not at all.

Number one, Mrs. De Shields was in a bikini, and number two, Mrs. De Shields very adequately filled that bikini. He had not seen a body like that on a thirty-five-year-old woman in some time. Probably not since one of Jane Fonda’s earlier movies. She was off by herself on one side of the beach, in a little cove by the dam, standing in water up to her ankles.

He should have ducked back into his cruiser, made a swing of the parking lot as if on a routine check, and peeled out. But he didn’t. His rhythm was off. Personal problems again. Man, his personal problems were going to do a number on him yet. Bunk tugged on his ear, scuffed the gravel with his shoe, and started to turn back to his cruiser just as, as if on cue, the mermaid a hundred feet away turned her head and saw him. She stared at him expressionlessly.

Good one, Cummins. Real good. Unfortunately, it was too late to turn back, so he surged ahead. There was something comical about a cop in full dress—.357 magnum strapped to his side, handcuffs, keys, radio, and flashlight swinging from his waist like a portable hardware store—interviewing a woman with perhaps one square foot of acrylic covering her body.

"Mrs. De Shields?"

She walked out of the water over to the cement pier that formed the near side of the dam and sat down.

"I hate to disturb you, but..."

"Have you found out who killed my husband yet?"

"No. I thought maybe you could help. Tell us if you know of anyone who had a grudge against him. A disgruntled business partner. Anything."

Mrs. De Shields crossed her ankles, leaned back a little. The chief kept his eyes focused firmly on the top of her head. "Are you the chief of police here?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You gotta be kidding. Has anyone told you you're too cute to be a police chief?"

He hadn't been expecting that. He could feel the blood pump into his face like a geyser and glanced down at the waves lapping nearby; but he also, and

this bothered him, felt a murky shiver of excitement. The woman laughed.

"Judging by the color of your face, I guess no one has. Sorry about that." She cocked one lissom leg up on the cement and clasped its ankle with her hand. "No, I don't know of anyone who hated him that much. There were a lot of people who didn't care much for Roone, he tended to get what he wanted and too bad if you were in the way." She looked past his shoulder toward the main part of the beach where fifty or so people were swimming, building sand castles, and turning slowly in the sun like rotisseried meat. Sounds of splashing and children's gay cries drifted over. Her mouth turned down in what he thought was a bitter twist. After a pause she went on. "He had his needs, like all of us, and he satisfied them. But—shoot him?"

"No ideas? No leads?"

For a long time Jean De Shields stared sightlessly at the splashing children, and then she shifted her eyes to his. "Did you talk to a man named Leonard Strachey from West Hartford?"

"Yes."

"Leonard once worked in the same real estate office as Roone. Then he went off and started his own agency. What was he

doing up here? Just happened to be driving through is what he told me."

"You don't believe him?"

"Maybe he was, maybe he wasn't. I never cared that much for Leonard."

"Hm." Bunk had already called the Hartford police on Strachey and got a rundown on his record: two speeding tickets. "We'll check him out, Mrs. De Shields. Thanks for the tip."

"Hey."

Bunk had pulled out a handkerchief and was wiping the back of his neck. Thinking maybe he should peel off all this hardware and dive into that cool blue water. Why not? Give everyone on the beach a thrill.

"Don't bother checking him out. I don't like Leonard, but I don't think he's into murder. You want to know what I really think? Check out the neighbors to the Dopp place. The Lefevres. George Lefevre and his son want that property real bad. I understand they even made a few veiled threats before the auction. You know, 'They'll be sorry if they steal it from us.' 'They'll end up wishing they hadn't.' Stuff like that. Not out and out, 'We'll shoot the bastard,' but threatening nevertheless."

"I was watching George when your husband was shot."

"What about Arnold?"

The chief frowned at that. Arnold Lefevre had been there, too. A bit looped, as usual. That wasn't a Coke in his paper bag. And he'd seen Arnold loitering near the entrance to the house before the auction started. Have to check up on that.

"I'll look into that, Mrs. De Shields. If you think of anything else—anything at all that might help us—please get in touch." He started to turn and stopped. "By the way, where were you during the shooting?"

"Pardon me?"

He looked at her without answering. Vaguely aware of lots of tanned smooth skin; too much tanned smooth skin. The sooner he got out of there the better.

"So now I'm a suspect?"

"You weren't at his side when he was shot. Routine. We want to know where everyone was."

"I was on the porch. When it rained earlier I decided no use getting wet and headed for the porch."

"Were you with someone? Is there someone who can vouch—?"

"Whoa." She lowered her leg and stood up, walked the five feet across the sand until she was less than a foot away. "You may be cute, Cummins, but you're not very bright. No, I wasn't talking to anyone, possibly because I don't *know* anyone up here except the

Throckmortons, and no, I did not kill my husband. Okay?" The long pretty face crumpled, a hand rose to her eyes, she turned away.

Real good, thought Bunk, shuffling back to his cruiser. Real good. Give that cop a gold star. But he didn't really appreciate how good a job he had done until he heard a familiar cry, "Daddy! It's Daddy!"

Connor and Jessica were at the opposite end of the beach with their plastic pails and shovels. And with them was Heather, staring right at him.

It was almost a relief, driving back to the station, when he saw the scuffle outside Spike's Bar on Main Street. This was more like it. This was what he was paid to do, fights, noisy drunks, wheelies and doughnuts on the Town Hall lawn, speeders, fender benders. Not some rich guy from out of state taking a .243 slug in the heart at an auction.

Looked like Guy Blodgett and a fellow he didn't know. Guy, wearing his usual soiled red cap—he must brush his teeth and sleep in the thing; sleep in it anyway, since it didn't look like he brushed his teeth that much—had a wooden chair raised over his head. The other man was backing away with an arm up to protect his face.

"Damn flatlander," cried Guy. "Why don't you go back where you came from?" He shook his chair and whirled around when Bunk wrenched it from his grasp. His bloodshot eyes rolled in his head. He started to swing at the chief, but stopped himself.

"I don't believe this guy, officer," said the other man. "I just asked him if there was a good trout stream around here. You'd think I'd insulted his grandmother."

"Ruinin' Vermont," cried Guy. "Connecticut, Jersey, Wash'ton, come here and mess it up for us."

Bunk nodded toward the rear seat of the squad car. "You want a ride to Ravensburg, Guy? Sober up in the pokey?"

The prospect of jail apparently did not appeal to Blodgett, for he muttered a few more salty imprecations and stumbled off down the street.

"Try Stevens Brook," Bunk told the shaken flatlander. "Out about two miles on Route 29."

Getting back into his Gran Torino, he was almost whistling. Nothing like a sidewalk scuffle to bring you back to earth.

**I**t was raining when he walked into the Lefevre barn during evening chores. Fifty black and white Holsteins

shifted in their stanchions chewing hay, dozing, swatting flies with their tails while George and his son Arnold milked. George Lefevre, a large man with a ruddy face and panda-bear gut, saw him coming down the aisle and set down his milker. "Don't shoot!" he cried, raising his hands toward the cobwebby ceiling.

"I'll try not to," said Bunk.

"What's on your mind?" There was a twinkle in George's eye. He was one of those people who wore a perpetual smile, and for the most part it was genuine, but there was also a watchfulness in his gaze. He might look a little simple at times, but he wasn't.

"Murder."

George jerked his head back in mock surprise. "You mean you haven't figured that out yet, Bunk? I did it. Wanted the Dopp place so's Arnold and I could run one big fancy dairy farm like they do in Wisconsin and California."

Bunk chuckled, sort of. "I was looking right at you when De Shields was shot."

"Aw, shucks. Thought I was going to get out of finishing chores." Lefevre kicked the stainless steel milker with his crusted shoe while the chief moved on down the aisle.

"Lo, Arnold."

Arnold glowered up at him

from his crouch beside a cow with an udder the size of a medicine ball—a deflated medicine ball, since he was finishing up milking her—and said nothing.

"Just thought I'd ask where you were the other day at the auction when De Shields was shot."

"None of your business."

"I'm afraid it is my business." There was no love lost between him and the younger Lefevre. He'd picked up Arnold three times for DWI and once for breaking his girlfriend's jaw in a lover's quarrel. At the moment, Arnold had neither a driver's license nor a girlfriend. He was the classic angry young man—only he wasn't so young any more. He was thirty-five with pouched eyes and a rapidly receding hairline. "A man was killed and I'm a cop. So I think—"

The farmer sniggered. "No kidding! I didn't know you were a cop." He slipped the teat cups off Sunrise, stripped her by hand, and stood. "All right. I'll tell you where I was. And you're gonna love this, Cummins. You're really gonna love this. I was out back of the house puking."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. 'Oh.' One beer too many. You've heard of that, haven't you?"

"Was anyone with you?"



Arnold set his milker on the sawdusted aisle and laughed unpleasantly. He was laughing, but Bunk also thought he saw fear in his eyes. A sneering hatred with, at its center, a jag of cold fear. "I hate to tell you this, Cummins, but when I'm puking I like to be alone. Okay? I don't like someone holding my hand."

"You own a caliber .243."

"Huh?"

"You heard me."

Arnold licked his lips. Some sluggish thought process seemed to be going on behind his blood-shot eyes. "I might."

"Can I see it?"

"You got a search warrant?"

"No."

"Then forget it." Arnold smiled. "Now if you'll excuse me, *sir*, I'd like to finish milking these goddamn cows."

So where did that leave him? Three suspects: the victim's widow, a stranger from Connecticut, and Arnold Lefevre. And the only piece of evidence a .243 rifle slug with no rifle to go with it. He supposed he'd have to motor down to Hartford and question Strachey some more. On the other hand, the Elizabethville PD's budget was already severely strained; maybe he'd just forget about that little excursion.

Bunk stopped by a caked

manure spreader in Lefevre's yard and thought. He just couldn't see that man in the Lacoste shirt running up to the second floor to shoot an old business partner, and it was even harder picturing Jean De Shields doing it. She had her problems; she was an out-and-out flirt—or seemed to be, he wasn't sure what her game really was—but shoot her own husband? Bunk hoped fervently the killer was not Jean De Shields. The fabric of society was shaky enough without something that weird.

Moving away from the manure spreader—in the back of his mind was the nagging thought that he should have been a farmer instead of a policeman; sleep better, anyway—Cummins had a feeling the case boiled down to one thing: where had the killer hidden the gun?

Should he get a warrant and make another search of the house? Tear it apart this time, board by board? Except that this was three days later, and since no one lived in the house, surely the killer had come back and removed the rifle. Unless somehow he had taken it away on the day of the shooting.

He drove into town, parked outside the station, and started walking down South Main. It was five thirty, which meant he

had almost an hour before he had to be at the ballfield for the first game of the Little League playoffs. Time to make a swing through town, clear his head. Who knows, maybe there'd be another fight outside Spike's, or he'd catch one of the Goff boys burning rubber by the traffic dummy. But people were driving around the dummy as if it were Be Polite to Your Neighbor Week and the only person outside Spike's was Al Henderson blinking in the sun.

The brainstorm—idea, anyway—came to him as he glanced through the windows of Patsy's Dairy Whip. He stepped inside.

Ercole Bilotti, architect, gourmand, bon vivant, and weighing two eighty, sat on a stool at the counter—or rather engulfed a stool—licking a double-dip chocolate chip pistachio cone. Ercole knew old houses like the back of his hand, he might just have an idea where a sniper could hide a rifle—and then come back later and remove it.

"Oh-oh," said Ercole, catching sight of the chief, "caught in the act."

"Don't worry, I won't run you in. This time. I need some architectural advice."

"Shoot, Bunky."

Cummins winced inwardly. Ercole had been calling him Bunky ever since they'd first

known each other. He didn't think the architect was being malicious, either; that's just the way he saw the world, or tried to see the world: ice cream cones, syrupy love songs, Bunky instead of Bunk. He took the stool next to Ercole. "You know the Dopp place?"

"Sure. Where that guy from Connecticut was shot last Saturday afternoon. I hear the widow has decided to keep it."

"A little rundown, isn't it?"

Ercole licked; wiped his chin with a paper napkin; licked. "Bunky, you'd look a little rundown, too, if you were born in 1850. I'm pretty sure that house was part of the Underground Railway."

"Huh?" Bunk stared at the big man next to him and felt a strange prickling in the back of his neck. "You mean a house where they hid runaway slaves?"

"Righto. Probably has a secret passageway in the cellar."

The prickling intensified. But would the killer have time to run down from the second floor into the basement, hide the gun, then run back up and saunter outside as if nothing had happened? "What? What's that?" Ercole had just said something else.

"Maybe a secret compartment upstairs, too. Some abolitionists had sliding panels in

closets. Just in case the slave was upstairs when the marshalls came. Hey, where you going, Bunky? Stick around. Have a cone on me. I'm telling you, one of these babies'll make your day."

The panel was a little warped and took some force, but it moved. And judging from the marks in the dust, it had been moved recently by someone else. He turned his light into the tiny cubicle full of cobwebs and scraps of wood and saw in the drift of dust on the floor the outline left by an object three feet long and wider at one end than at the other. He shoved the panel shut and looked at his watch.

Six fifteen. He had five minutes to get to the ballfield.

He'd get the search and arrest warrants after the game and then pay a visit to Arnold Lefevre. His second and last visit to Arnold.

**T**he stands were already full when he got to the field outside Kellogg Union where the Elizabethville Catamounts were playing the Colleytown Tigers—cats against cats. The Catamounts were warming up on the field, the Tigers standing around their coach.

Putting on his ump's gear, he

let his eye cruise over the stands and saw Heather and the kids—Connor at seven would be trying out for the Catamounts next year—in the front row near the first-base line. He waved to her, and got a vague stare toward center field as if maybe she hadn't seen him. This wasn't like Heather, to hold a grudge that long. Unless . . . Could she really think he might have something going on the side? With the De Shields woman, for example? Bunk strapped on his chest pad, thumped it hard with his fist, and quit thinking nonsense.

On his way to the plate, he passed Guy Blodgett and his grimy red cap. Guy was feeling no pain, as usual, but at least he wasn't threatening anyone with a chair. "'Lo, Guy," he said, and for an answer got a surly grunt. A small smile crept across Bunk's face. He sure was popular today. Well, it was always nice to see one of his troublemakers at a baseball game cheering on the home team. Matter of fact, Guy had a grandson, Daryl Blodgett, on the team. Nice kid, too, let's hope he doesn't take after grandpa.

The game was not much of a contest. The Tigers were a fair team, but they had the big game jitters and were stumbling around like the losing

team in an NFL Super Bowl. He was thinking it was a little dull when, in the bottom of the sixth, Daryl tried to stretch a single to right field into a double and got thrown out at second base. Bunk knew the Tiger second baseman slightly, or his father anyway. Lionel Lang had made it big importing something from Korea—shoes? sweatshirts? VCR's?—bought an old farm in Colleytown for two hundred grand, and moved up. Lang was a go-getter. A member of the local planning commission and school board, had campaigned strongly for Made-line Kunin in the last governor's election.

No problem—except that Daryl didn't just get tagged out, he also got a knee in the groin. It looked to Bunk like an accident, but not to Daryl's grandfather, who was out of those stands like a bulldog, waving his fist and shouting.

"Ya dirty player. Go back where you came from, kid. We don't need your kind up here."

"Just a minute." Lionel Lang, about six five and not skinny, stepped out of the stands as Daryl Blodgett came limping and sniffing back to the bench. "It was an accident."

"Yeah?" Guy spun around and faced him. Bunk could see he had gone around the bend, his eyes were bulging, lips curled

back like over-fried scraps of bacon. "An accident? A knee in the guts? You're the accident, bub. Coming up here and muckin' everything up for us. You're the—"

Bunk's fist closed around the front of Guy's shirt. He twisted, there was a gurgling sound. "Go home and cool off, Guy, we don't need that talk around here."

Blodgett started to say something else, saw Buck's face, and after giving the finger to the world in general weaved off toward his pickup.

"Play ball!" shouted the chief. He headed back to his position behind the plate and stopped. Stopped dead. He was staring at Blodgett's truck as it spewed gravel and rattled off toward the main road. That detail at the auction, that little thing that was out of whack and he couldn't think what it was.

He was looking through the rear window of the Chevy C-10, but he couldn't see Blodgett's red cap. Saturday afternoon, when Blodgett was pulling away from the Dopp place along with all the other vehicles, he could see his cap. Saw it plain as day. Shouldn't have been able to, though, because Blodgett's back window was covered by gun racks holding two rifles.

When he left the auction, there was only one rifle.

**I**t was raining the next morning when, armed with a search warrant for a .243-caliber rifle, Bunk perched in Blodgett's muddy yard. He had come early, hoping to catch Guy before he went to work for Borman & Bros., General Contractors. He thought Blodgett was working with a crew jack-ing up a house on Osgood Pond. A summer house, naturally. Someone with big bucks—or at least Guy probably assumed they had big bucks because wasn't that the definition of a summer person: money? Guy had his red cap on and was shaking water out of a tarp in the bed of his truck. Both rifles were there in their mounts. Behind him was the trailer he lived in with his wife and a grownup son—not Daryl's father—who wasn't quite all there. The trailer was a little on the ratty side. It had a dented stovepipe, cardboard in one window, and a porch that looked like a health hazard. Who was responsible for its rundown appearance? Wealthy flatlanders? Or possibly the people who lived in it and didn't care that much what it looked like.

Guy slid an eye over and went on shaking the tarp. A puddle of water dropped off the tailgate.

"Three times in three days,

huh, Cummins? You got a thing about me?"

"Is that a .243 Remington there?"

Guy stared at him expressionlessly, but Bunk thought he sagged more than usual for a second. "How come?"

"I think it's the rifle that shot De Shields, and I've got a warrant to take it into Ballistics and find out."

"Ballistics. Big word for a country cop. Take it."

"I found the secret compartment in the closet where you hid it, Guy. Then came back the next day and picked it up. How'd you know about that?"

Guy Blodgett studied the chief for a long time without a word, so long that the door to the trailer opened and Ginger Blodgett stuck her head out. She looked at them a moment, and went back inside.

With a sigh Blodgett sat on the wet tailgate. He stared off across the dirt road, the swamp on the other side, the early morning mist curling around dead alders. Suddenly he banged his fist on the tailgate, jumped up, and ran toward the cab. He never reached it. Bunk had him in a bear hug, squeezing. For a while Guy kicked and thrashed, and then sagged against the truck. Bunk snapped on the cuffs and stepped back, brushing off his uniform.



"It was the rain that did it," said Blodgett. "The rain killed him much as anything."

Bunk said nothing.

"See, I was just fixing to bad-mouth him after he bought it. Say something like, well now, aren't you proud of yourself for stealing another Vermont farm? But then it rained, see, and I went back to my truck to get my poncho and my eyes lit right on that rifle, that goddamn Remington, and I thought, man alive, I can sneak this thing into the house under my wrap and no one'll know. And, see, I worked on that old house once, helped put in a new sill, so's I knew all about them hiding places. Because I figured, hey, after I shoot this guy I'd better not be traipsing out of the house with a rifle under my slicker . . . Yeah. That's how it was."

The voice seemed more muddled than angry now. Blodgett stared blankly at his trailer, at the unmoving form staring back at them from a window. "It was the rain," he said quietly. "Hadden't rained, nothing would have happened. Funny how things turn out."

"Hey, ump!" cried a squeaky kid's voice from behind home plate, a squeaky kid's voice he was trying hard to ignore. "Who's

your optombulist?"

There was a ripple of laughter and not all of it was from children. Another kid said to Squeaky, "That's optometrist, fool."

Bunk crouched behind the catcher, one hand behind his back and the other under his pad, and watched the hard curve ball come in and slap the catcher's mitt.

"Stee-rike!"

This was more like it. A good clean strike catching a large chunk of the plate. He wasn't crazy about the real close calls because he knew how much this game meant to the kids and their parents and friends. On the next pitch the batter lined out to third and Bunk swept off the plate, thinking, I should have been umpiring ever since I became a cop instead of just last year. The national pastime. Sun, grass, cheering fans, the crack of the bat, you can't beat it.

But in the seventh inning things got tense. Very tense. The Catamounts were trailing the Rock River Hornets by one run, tying run on second, a two and two count on the Cats' left fielder, Carlos Sanchez. Carlos smacked the next pitch to the shortstop, who made a wild throw to first base. Carlos was safe on first and Trapper Dougan rounded third and with the

fans yelling their heads off sprinted for home. But the Hornet right fielder had run in to back up the first baseman and now had the ball, arm cocked.

Trapper hit the dirt just as the Hornet catcher caught the ball. Cummins saw ball touch shoe inches before the plate. But the fans, or most of them, didn't.

"You're out!"

He waited for the barrage of catcalls and hoots, and it came. With Squeaky leading the pack.

"Let's start a collection, folks. Get that numby a pair of glasses!"

And then when the jeering had calmed down and he was about to say play ball, a single voice soared out from the crowd.

It was high and clear and clean like the flight of an eagle, and he knew it well.

"Yea, ump! You're doing a great job!"

Bunk didn't want to turn around, he knew he should get on with the game, but he did. He looked at Heather for maybe half a minute and neither one smiled or said anything or even breathed. He blinked a couple of times and quickly turned back to the game. As he got set for the pitch, he heard Squeaky's voice again, only this time it was a bare whisper.

"Gee, Daddy, we hurt his feelings, didn't we?" There was a pause, and the kid added, "Next time he makes a dumb call I guess I won't yell at him."

*Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. 7055, Red Oak, Iowa 51591. For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.*

FICTION

# Pearls from Heaven

by Gregor Robinson

tj standish 70

**T**he Russian satellite turned me into a blackmailer. When the men from Washington came to see me with their polyester suits and their plastic-coated identity cards, I felt I really had no choice. I had been in the islands for less than a month and business was terrible. I did it for the best of reasons: the bank's staying in business would be good for the village. In fact, for a few weeks, the satellite itself was a shot in the arm for the whole island—like pearls from heaven. Besides, by remaining quiet about what I knew, I believe I saved Vero's life. We all have our little secrets. The trick is to make sure they stay that way. If you can make money doing it, well, that is simply good business as far as I can see.

Although I must say, I never thought I would come to the rescue of Tom Hargreaves. He was always telling these stupid stories, and he was always the hero, a swashbuckling, romantic figure. In contrast to myself, a mere financial man.

"She was ketch-rigged," he said, "forty-four feet, and we were taking her from the Cape to Bermuda for the winter. It was really too late in the year for that kind of crossing—the middle of November, the weather unreliable—but her owner was a friend of mine, high up in the service." Here he paused to add special meaning to the word "service," just to let us know it was a confidential matter about which he could say no more. "And I had agreed to do it as a favor to him. My son Tom was along with his girl. And then the owner's friend. He was the banker. Supposed to be doing some special work for us on laundering operations—flight capital, that sort of thing."

Hargreaves paused and looked at me. I knew then it was going to be a story with a grim ending—the banker letting the side down: a poor sailor at the very least, perhaps a poltroon.

"More coffee?" He reached across for the pot which was on a glass and wrought-iron table in front of Burnett.

It was midmorning, and we were sitting on the terrace of Hargreaves' house, a low pink villa nestled below the ridge on the Atlantic side of the island. The breeze was gentle and warm, and the ocean broke lazily on the white sand below. I was wearing sandals, white cotton pants, and a blue shirt with pictures and recipes for rum punches printed all over it. I didn't feel like a banker. Still, this was supposed to be a business meeting. It was a lot different from the way we did things in Montreal.

"No, thanks," I said.

Hargreaves' wife came out of the house and fussed with the pot as though she were the maid. She was a solicitous, nervous woman. I think she was glad Hargreaves was having this little meeting with Burnett and myself—it gave him something to do. He was one of those people who had retired too early, of which there are many in the islands.

"The weather hit towards the end of the second day. Real Atlantic weather, the worst I'd ever seen."

These sailing stories—I don't know if you've ever noticed but it's always the worst weather they've ever seen. Still, I stared at the man in wide-eyed encouragement. He was a prospective customer.

"Wind out of the northeast. Got up to forty knots. We managed to get the main down. Continued under the mizzen reefed and a headsail. The stays held and we sailed like that most of the way. None of us was feeling at all well. We did our watches, then straight to bed. Young Tom's girl kept things neat below, did most of the cooking. Then the electricity went. We had an auxiliary radio but nothing else—no lights, no heat, motor wouldn't turn over. That's when this banker fellow went below for good. Too sick, he said, couldn't help with anything. Of course, he had the aft cabin—he was the owner's friend—so the rest of us took turns in the saloon. Snatches of rest between doing all the work. His work. He didn't recover until we were safe in the harbor at Hamilton. Then he was fine—off golfing with friends, drinking at night; we hardly saw him."

Hargreaves paused to let the enormity of the outrage sink in.

"Terrible thing, a poor sailor," said Burnett.

"Worse than that. Turned out the fellow had been selling secrets to the Russians," said Hargreaves. "He was on his way out of the country when he signed on with us. The plan was all laid on. Bermuda, then a boat to Cuba, something like that. I must say, I wasn't surprised. You sail with a fellow, you see his true colors. He ended up in jail."

Selling secrets to the Russians? Jail? It was worse than I had expected.

"Incredible," I said. "What an exciting life you have led."

I hated myself. I almost wished I were back in Canada arranging financing for used car dealers, despite the snow. Up there, it was the customers who did the toadying, not us bankers.

"True enough," said Hargreaves. "True enough."

Hargreaves was originally from Virginia, but he dressed like a



New Englander; the cotton pants they call Nantucket Reds, a navy blue polo shirt, old Top-Siders. He was in his late fifties, slightly younger than Burnett. I was the only expatriate male on the island in his thirties. I was also the only one who worked.

"You do much sailing now?" I asked, all oily charm.

There was a horrible silence. Burnett looked at his feet. Hargreaves looked out to sea. I thought maybe he hadn't heard me and was about to repeat the question when Burnett slapped the arms of his chair and said,

"Well, Tom, we must be off." This was news to me, I had nothing on for the rest of the day, but taking my cue Burnett, I rose from my chair. "Thanks for the coffee, Tom. You know where you can find David—" Burnett gestured in my direction "—if you want to discuss details. He knows' all about the tax arrangements down here. Very convenient. I do all my banking in the village now. You simply must go in and talk to him."

"Right," said Hargreaves. No longer chatty, he was now in a bad mood. He was well known for his moods.

We walked through the house to the front door. The main room was obsessively neat, *National Geographic* and yachting magazines stacked at right angles on glass table tops. There were framed antique maps on the walls, a barometer, other nautical curios and ships' instruments. In a small room to the side of the front door was a table set up with two-way radio equipment, a much more elaborate system than you normally saw in the islands. One of Hargreaves' hobbies.

Mary Hargreaves came out of the kitchen and walked us through the garden while her husband remained in the house. At the front gate she turned to me and said, "Thank you for coming, Mr. Renison."

"David," I said, smiling my unctuous smile for prospective rich customers. "It was my pleasure."

She was probably twenty-five years older than I was. She shook my hand quickly and lightly by the fingertips, then interlaced her fingers neatly in front of her, to keep them still, it appeared. Her movements were sudden—birdlike and nervous.

"Drop by again. Tom needs to see men, to talk."

That was my first meeting with Tom and Mary Hargreaves. They spent six months a year in Falmouth, Cape Cod, and six months in the islands, and Burnett had taken me over to meet Tom within a week of their arrival. Burnett was a director of the bank in

Canada; he was more interested than I was in drumming up new business.

"What was all that about the sailing," I said as we strolled along the road to the village, "when everybody stopped talking and looked down at their shoes?"

"Tom used to be a great sailor. It was part of his identity, Cape Cod, regattas, all that. Then a couple of years ago, he had some accident on an Atlantic crossing. Lost his nerve. His sloop in the harbor—he hasn't set foot on it in two years. Anybody mentions it he goes into a mental decline."

So that explained Mary's solicitousness.

"He ought to see a shrink," I said. I loathed sailing myself.

"He'll get over it," said Burnett, "that's what Mary says. Best thing is not to talk about it. You ought to get to know him. Tom Hargreaves is very well off. He owns rental properties here and on other islands. He knows people, and he's legit."

This meant that for once we didn't have to worry about the money coming from the drug trade. The objective in opening this branch had been half public relations and half to broaden the business. Head Office was getting nervous: some of the other off-shore branches were getting a reputation as havens for illegal funds.

"So where does it come from," I said, "his money?"

"Family," said Burnett. "Old money."

"The best kind," I said.

Tom Hargreaves' forebears had been friendly with presidents, ambassadors, the Rockefellerers. He had retired early after a career in the foreign service.

"They say round here it had something to do with intelligence," said Burnett. "A spy."

**A** spy. Of course. I had thought he was just a rich old man with a fragile ego, but secretly he was some kind of James Bond figure. I should not have been surprised. For every member of the expatriate community there was some story like that, a distant and more complex past, perhaps because for so many of them the present was simple, flat, and repetitive. Half a year down here, half a year in Vermont or Connecticut. The heart of the day was the afternoon nap. Like the Hargreaves, many had retired early. Tax exiles. You saw them at the Yacht Club. You heard their personal myths. A man with his own island had made a fortune manufacturing baseball caps: he knew all the big hitters.

With Mrs. Holborne, it was a history with rich men: her third and final marriage had ended because of something to do with a stable boy, and she'd moved down here with Mr. Holborne's money.

But Tom Hargreaves' history was the best I had heard. He nurtured the thing himself, of course. With a spy, how else would you know; it's like people's sex lives or how much money they make. He was always telling those stories, like the story of the treasonous banker fleeing to Cuba. And he was vague about the places he had been posted: London, yes, he had definitely been there. Paris? We thought so. Vienna? Berlin? Hargreaves merely pursed his lips and scratched his scaly forehead.

Sometimes I saw him at the Poolside Bar of the Majestic, looking bored and out of place in that *déclassé* setting. But then there would be some passing reference in the conversation, some feeble joke: "Better watch what you say. We have the CIA here." A wink at old Tom. And old Tom would smile, and hoist his bourbon.

It kept him going—his storied past. His father may have known the Rockefellers and his grandfather may have worked closely with Woodrow Wilson, but Tom was a spy. Even the villagers knew the story, and they revered him for it. There was a large radio aerial next to his house. People said he was still in touch with Washington.

Despite the introduction from Burnett, I never saw Tom Hargreaves professionally. At the bank Winnie occasionally cashed a traveler's check for Mary Hargreaves, nothing more. The few times I ran into Tom socially, he made unpleasant jokes about banking. He had this idea that we were taking money out of the country and lending it elsewhere, in Montreal and New York, to western oilmen. Exactly what the bank was doing, of course. Still, it didn't make for a very friendly connection. Tom seemed to think I was about on the level of a pimp. I thought Tom was pompous, officious, supercilious, and self-important. And, of course, rich.

**A**n island is like a ship, self-contained, and everyone hears soon enough what's going on. The village was the nerve center: news flowed out like an electric current—from the government dock when the ferry came in; from Drover's store where the villagers and most of the expatriates did their shopping; from the Riverside Tavern and the Poolside Bar of the Majestic Hotel. The people who lived farther away—at the end of North Point, or down the road towards Tilloo Cay, or on some more

remote island—would hear the news when they came to the Yacht Club Saturday nights. The ragged refugees from Haiti and Cuba who lived in the bush had their own shadowy network of which we knew little.

The bank was next door to the Majestic, and often I heard things early, usually from Winnie, who worked with me behind the counter.

"A wreck," she said, "washed up on the beach. Vero found it this morning."

That was the earliest version. It must have been within an hour or two of Vero's having found the thing.

"A piece of metal. That's really all it is," Burnett told me later in the day. It was a Friday, when he customarily came in for his mail, his banking, and a couple of drinks at the hotel.

"Have you seen it?" I asked.

"No. One of the fellows working on my tennis court told me. Friend of Vero's."

Vero was a local boy, from one of the extended families that had been here for two hundred years. They lived at the far end of the island, and Vero customarily came to the village on an old bicycle, walking the thing part of the way, using trails made by the refugees through the bush and in the scrub above the beach. Because of this he often knew what was going on in the Haitian settlements. One time he asked me if I could speak Spanish, said he wanted to communicate with some of the Cuban refugees. He was a regular source of information at the Majestic, where he worked part time behind the thatched bar by the swimming pool. Recently he had acquired a Japanese trail bike, the only such machine on the island, which made him even more mobile and even more knowledgeable.

He had been riding in the scrubby growth above the beach when he came across the piece of metal. He found it high up in the grass, beyond the line of debris that was regularly thrown up by the surf at high tide.

On Saturday mornings Vero worked at the Poolside—it was their busiest time—pounding conch for the fritters in the little kitchen at the back of the thatched hut, helping out at the bar.

I stopped by after lunch after doing my shopping, when the crowd had thinned. We discussed the thing he had found. I was skeptical of the romantic interpretations.

"It could have been thrown up in the spring," I said, "or even last year."

"Too shiny for that, man. Wasn't old enough. And it wasn't there before. I know 'cause I would have seen it. You got to go see for yourself, man."

Big waves were both too simple and too unlikely an explanation. Thus a story developed that the piece of metal had fallen from the sky. This was Vero's personal theory.

"From a plane," he said. "Soon they be coming at night to see what else come down."

He was referring to the search for bales of marijuana or tightly bound packages of cocaine that might have come from the plane. The idea wasn't as strange as it seemed; the islands were dotted with little airstrips—there were over twenty on Andros alone—and it was not uncommon to see the splayed hulks of small planes hanging in the trees. At Norman's Cay there was what looked like a complete DC3 jammed in the sand in a couple of feet of water. That plane had come from the Guajira Peninsula, Burnett told me, in Colombia. And I myself had seen a soggy bale of what looked like weeds wallowing in front of my terrace one morning.

But you seldom had one piece of an airplane falling to the ground without the rest close behind, and there had been no reports or other signs of a crash on the island.

At first the piece of wreckage that Vero had found on the beach was of more interest to the villagers and the Haitians than to the expatriates, the yachtsmen, and the tourists at the hotel.

There were many stories.

"Some voodoo thing," said Seymour Dufresne. "They take something that belong to someone, bang it up and write on it, use it to make a curse. Don't mean nothing." He was a Haitian but not a believer.

The wreck was mentioned only briefly at the Yacht Club.

"A piece of garbage from the ocean," said Mrs. Holborne. She had a loud opinion of everything. "Who cares?" She could not possibly be expected to be interested in anything over which the villagers were so exercised.

"It's not far from your place, Tom," Burnett said, fiddling with his pipe. We were all standing by the tiny Yacht Club bar. "You ought to go see it, tell us what you think."

Tom Hargreaves said he thought he probably would do just that, as soon as he could find the time.

And so, soon after that, we had a name for it. The Russian Satellite.



"Don't believe everything you hear," I said to Winnie, although I knew from experience that this was futile advice. "How do you know it's a satellite?"

"Mr. Hargreaves, he said so!" She was triumphant. "He went and he looked and he says so."

I never knew whether Tom Hargreaves had made the original identification or merely agreed with someone else's suggestion, but he had unquestionably become the central figure, the unimpeachable authority on whose say-so we had a Russian satellite on the beach. He knew about these things. He had been in American Intelligence. He said it was a Russian satellite, so that is what it must be. I heard it in the bank. I heard it from Madame Dell who did my sheets. I heard about it from Mrs. Rainey when I went to buy my grouper. I heard it from Drover while he wrapped up my frozen beef. I heard it from Seymour Dufresne, on one of his regular visits to try to wheedle money for his salvage operation. And I heard it from Vero at the Poolside Bar.

"There might be more stuff around out there," Vero said to an accepting audience. "Maybe some radio parts. Controls. We got to leave everything there, in case people from the government come to look. Mr. Hargreaves, I bet he going to call up Washington on his big radio. We got to make sure nobody touch anything. Might be radioactive."

Radioactive? I asked Mary Hargreaves when she came into the bank: Was there any real danger? She shrugged her shoulders, fluttered a little, and in her damp eyes was a look as though she were making a request. But all she said was,

"Oh, you know how people exaggerate." She had what was described as a sweet smile.

Three weeks after Vero's discovery people were going regularly out along the beach to look at it. At first only guests from the hotel, for whom it was a short walk; soon visitors from the yachts in the harbor, and then tourists from farther away—from Marsh Harbour and Treasure Cay. Here, on our beach, was evidence of the conflict between the superpowers, an abstraction made real by a bit of metal that had fallen from the sky. A photographer came from Great Abaco and Vero's picture was in the paper; they had it taped up behind the bar, just underneath the poem about Goombay Smash. Even the Yacht Club circle had developed an interest. Burnett had been out to have a look. He had heard the stories about Tom's getting in touch with Washington. We all had.

"You think they'll send someone out here to investigate?" Burnett asked Hargreaves. Hargreaves was relishing the celebrity. His mood was noticeably sunnier; his eyes were bright.

"Oh, I wouldn't be too surprised," said Tom, "wouldn't be too surprised at all."

In fact, when I told him several days later that a couple of U.S. military men had been over, he was very surprised; he turned quite pale.

They came into the bank, as visitors on any kind of business often do, for in a tax and tourist haven, banks are at the heart of everything, and in the islands the government is little in evidence.

"You know where this Russian satellite is supposed to be?" said the tall one. He was the metals and aerospace expert, from the Defense Department. The other was CIA. They showed me their plastic-coated identification cards, their pictures on one side, the great eagle with the arrows in its claw on the other. Both men wore light polyester suits.

"Walk to the end of the Queen's Highway, then left. Follow the path that runs along behind the graveyard."

"The graveyard? Jesus, where's that again?"

So I offered to take them myself.

You could tell where the satellite was by tourists milling around. People were taking pictures. Some small boys had a bonfire going on the beach nearby. Another boy, slightly older, was selling beer from a Styrofoam cooler.

The thing itself was a curved piece of silvery-gray metal, perhaps five feet long. It was about two feet wide at the base and tapered to a rough and ragged point at the other end. On the inside of the curved metal skin were what looked like tubular ribs, sheared bolts, and several bits of bent, hanging metal. On the outside, about half-way down, there was a painted blue stripe, and just below that, faded and peeling, a large blue letter P. I could see that this would be the final letter in the initials CCCP, as you see on the sweaters of the Russian hockey team. It might also be any other word or symbol including the letter P.

The men from Washington sent the tourists away and began their examination. I stayed to watch, which they didn't seem to mind. They were very thorough. They used magnifying glasses, and micrometers, and what looked to me like a Geiger counter, and a thing that enabled them to estimate density, and God knows what else. After a while I grew uninterested and wandered away.

The men dropped in at my office on their way back, about an hour and a half later. It was very hot, and the taller man—he was the one from the Defense Department—kept wiping his face with a handkerchief.

“Wonder how that rumor got started,” he said.

“Did you talk to Hargreaves?” I asked.

“Who is Hargreaves?” said the man from the CIA.

“The guy who called you over here,” I said. “Ex-foreign service.”

“No one called us over here,” said the man from the CIA. Then there was an awkward pause. I felt I had put them on the spot, as though they were covering up. I thought: So old Tom really was a spy.

“Some story in the newspaper,” said the tall man, the one from the Defense Department. “We had to check.” He produced a clipping, the same one that was taped to the wall behind Vero’s bar. “Here, you keep it. A little souvenir.”

“Tom Hargreaves,” said the CIA man, ruminating. “Name’s familiar—from when I was in State. Economics Section, was it? No, I know! Trade and consular affairs, some industry officer or other—that’s it. Wasn’t he in London for years?”

They said the metal was very light and could have been carried easily by the wind. We had a drink next door and then I walked with them to the pier where they had a launch waiting.

“So? What did they say?” I hesitated for a moment, and Mrs. Holborne caught it. “Just a piece of garbage!” She had a very shrill voice. “I knew it!”

The Hargreaveses stood behind Mrs. Holborne. Tom stared at the floor, motionless and quiet. Mary watched me with that damp look in her eyes. For once her hands were still at her sides. The club had fallen silent. Even the steward was watching. I felt like the character in the Maugham story, the expert on pearls confronted by fakes.

“They said it was the remains of a Russian satellite,” I said. And then, getting completely carried away, I added, “They said it is no longer radioactive; that the core had burned itself out re-entering the atmosphere. The remote sensing equipment landed elsewhere, and they have recovered most of it. That is all I am permitted to say.”

The party resumed.

A few days later Tom Hargreaves moved his business from Marsh

Harbour and Nassau over to me. It was substantial, far more than either Burnett or I had expected. At last I had a big legitimate customer. I was in business. I would not have to return to dreary Montreal. And people would still believe that Tom was a spy.

But there was an extra dividend, something besides the Somerset Maugham angle. Something funny was going on and I don't mean ha-ha. The men in the polyester suits told me that they had learned about the Russian Satellite from the paper, but the only paper it had been in was the Marsh Harbour weekly. It hadn't been in any of the other Bahamian or Florida papers. I gleaned them myself on a regular basis, part of my cursory attempt at doing "Caribbean country analysis" for regional Head Office. Did they really read the Marsh Harbour weekly up in Washington?

I was idly gazing at the clipping, which I had placed beneath the plastic cover on my desk blotter, when it struck me. I took the piece of paper and strolled across the Queen's Highway to the Poolside Bar of the Majestic. Instead of taking one of the tables overlooking the ocean, as I customarily did, I took a seat at the bar. Vero's shiny new motorcycle with the fat wheels was leaning against the side of the thatched hut.

"Nice machine," I said. "Where did you get it?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Those things cost, what, maybe twelve thousand U.S.? What do you earn here—three bucks an hour, and you work about ten hours a week at the most?"

That came to fifteen hundred dollars a year. Life was cheap in the islands, but not that cheap.

Vero was no longer shrugging his shoulders. He was no longer polishing the glasses. He just stood there staring at me. I pulled the picture of him with the Russian Satellite from my pocket, and said, "Maybe you would like this back, as a souvenir."

The masking tape on the blank space on the wall behind Vero, just above the funny poem about Goombay Smash, exactly matched the ripped masking tape on the clipping in my hand.

"Let me tell you how it is, Vero," I said. "You were the one who contacted the men from Washington. You thought it was a Russian satellite, all right, just like everyone else, and you wanted to make sure you got credit for finding it. Only you knew Hargreaves wasn't CIA, because by then your control had told you." His control? I don't know where I came up with this terminology. I tried to slow down my little speech; I was beginning to sound like Humphrey

---

---

Bogart. "You knew because *you* are the CIA contact on this island, Vero. Your job is to keep an eye on these refugees, the Haitians, the Nicaraguans, especially the Cubans. That's how come you wanted to know if I spoke Spanish. And that's how come you suddenly have twelve grand to spend on a motorcycle."

"Hey, what you want, man?" said Vero.

"Nothing," I said. "I am not going to tell people that you're a CIA spy. I mean, some of those Cubans in the bush, they would probably kill you if they knew, right? So I won't mention it. But, you know, this money the CIA is paying you, you ought to put it in a local bank, not somewhere over in Miami. And all the other Veros, they ought to bank here in the village, not over in Marsh Harbour. And you might also mention to the people here at the Poolside Bar that it would be a lot easier if they just brought their cash across the road. Also, you can pay for this beer."

I hadn't actually known whether Vero was a spy or not. For all I knew, he got the money selling drugs and someone filched the picture off the wall. But the bluff worked, and I am now able to say for certain that Vero's financial resources were not trivial. His entire extended family opened accounts at the bank. Business picked up considerably.

As for the Russian Satellite, it was taken to the museum, where it's in storage in the room behind the sisal-twisting machine. You have to ask specially if you want to see it. It resembles nothing so much as the side panel of an old aluminum row boat. Vero and I are the only ones who know for certain that that's exactly what it is. And we're not talking.

# MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

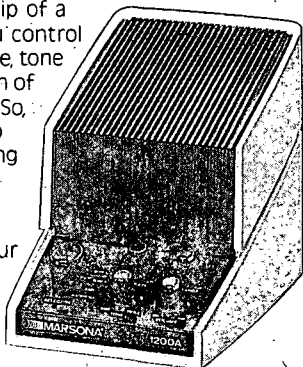
## ▼ SOUND CONDITIONER

Noise pollution is all around us in this fast-paced world. But sound conditioning is a practical approach to coping with noise that allows you to sleep, relax, and concentrate better. Marpac, a pioneer in sound conditioning has produced the new Marsona® 1200 A Sound Conditioner. This compact unit electrically synthesizes a variety of soothing natural sounds that helps screen out and reduce the problem of unwanted noise. The sounds of ocean surf, rushing waterfalls and rainfall can be yours with the flip of a switch. You control the volume, tone and rhythm of the sound. So, get back to the soothing sounds of nature without leaving your home.

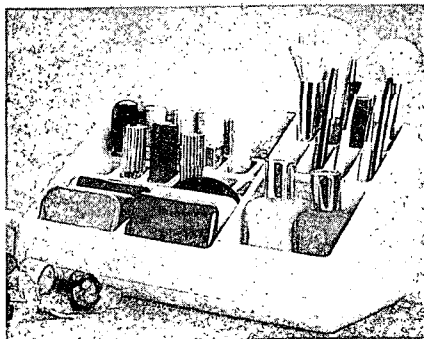
**\$139.98**

(\$5.25)

#A1971.



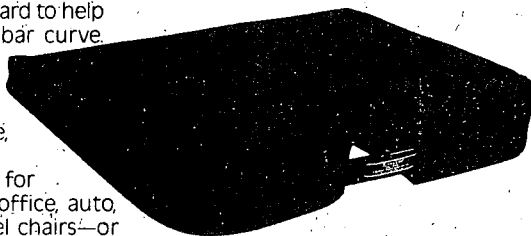
## ▼ A COSMETIC ORGANIZER THAT REALLY WORKS!!



This cosmetic organizer is the best we've seen. Created by Organizational Specialist Reina Alexis Barone™, this attractive, efficient organizer is designed to showcase fine cosmetics on top of dressing table or vanity to enhance any room decor. Holds up to 40 different cosmetic items. Made in the USA. Measures 12" x 6", scratch resistant. ABS plastic with a high gloss finish and non skid, non scratch base. Accessories not included. **\$27.98** (\$5.00) #A1928.

## ▼ TUSH CUSH

Are you one of the millions of Americans who suffers from low back pain? Do hours of prolonged sitting leave you aching or numb? If so, the revolutionary orthopedic "Tush Cush"™ is the seat of your dreams. This scientifically designed seat works to relieve and prevent back pain in 2 ways: first, it suspends the tailbone (coccyx) in the air and reduces the pressure on and within the lower spinal discs; second, the unique wedge shape tips the pelvis forward to help restore the spine's nature lumbar curve. Constructed of highly resilient polyurethane foam, the "Tush Cush"™ comes with a removable, machine washable, dark brown cover. It measures 14"x18" and features a handle for easy toting. Perfect for home, office, auto, sporting events, theatres, wheel chairs—or anywhere your "tush" needs a "cush"ion! **\$39.98** (\$5.00) #A1967.

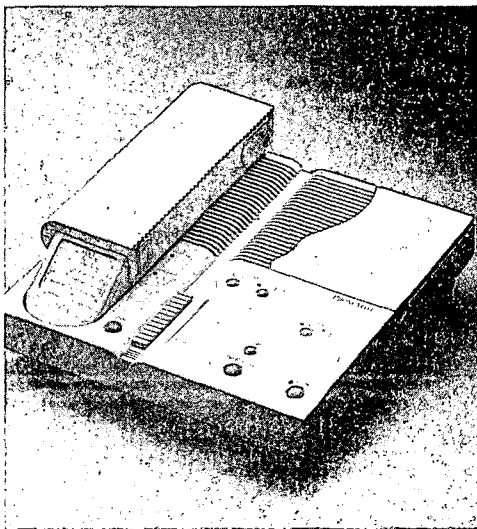


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



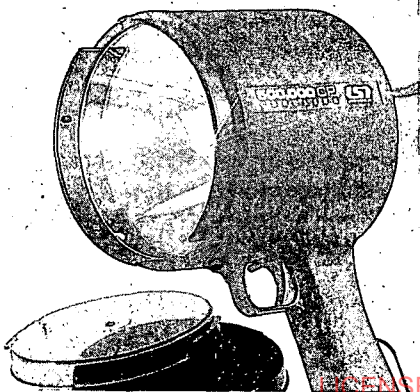
## ► PHONEMATE® 1850

**P**honemate® 1850 combines a state of the art answering machine with a handy cordless telephone. The answering machine features remote call screening, message waiting indicator, beeperless remote allowing you to access messages from most touchtone phones with your two digit access number, and the unit even permits household members to leave and receive messages for each other, independent of phone messages. The phone features an automatic digital security code to prevent unauthorized use of your line and a replaceable battery pack and antenna. Also—tone/pulse dialing, 9 station auto-dial, last number redial, mute, flash, and programmable pause. So, stay in touch with Phonemate® 1850. **\$219.98** (\$7.00) #A1972.



## ▼ NIGHT TRACKER™

**L**ight up your night! Night Tracker™, the cordless, rechargeable hand-held spotlight packs a 500,000 candlepower beam to give you a light whenever, wherever you need it. The beam is 10 times brighter than your automobile headlights and will carry over 1 mile. Operates on rechargeable batteries or recharge it from 110 volt AC outlet or from any 12 volt car or boat outlet. Perfect for home, travel, boating and camping. Made in the USA and comes with a 90 day warranty. Now featured with amber and red lens attachments. **\$79.98** (\$6.25) #A1975.



## ◀ ORANGE MAGIC



**C**itrus oil is a remarkably powerful cleaning agent though safe, gentle, natural and pleasant to use. Orange Magic levitates the toughest dirt and stains. Just spray it on, wait, rinse, and see dirt

vanish. It is the New York Transit Authority's cleaner of choice for combatting graffiti in the subways. Two 16oz. pump bottles for **\$15.98** (\$4.00) #A1342.

**TO ORDER:** Send check with item number for total amounts, plus shipping & handling shown in ( ) payable to **MAIL ORDER MALL**, Dept. 120 AH, P.O. Box 3006, Lakewood, N.J. 08701, or call TOLL FREE **1-800-365-8493**. NJ residents add 7% sales tax. We honor MasterCard/Visa. Sorry, no Canadian, foreign, or C.O.D. orders. Satisfaction Guaranteed. 30 day money back guarantee for exchange or refund. Allow 30 days for delivery.

Magalog Marketing Group Inc. © 1990  
1905 Swarthmore Ave., Lakewood, N.J. 08701

# Medusa in Mourning

by  
Marianne Strong



Anna loosened her fists and let her shoulders drop. Sophie's eyes were closed.

Faint lines crisscrossed the eyelids of the corpse. Veins, with no blood in them. That's why they were dead white lines, like chalk.

No one lay in his coffin with open eyes, but until now, Anna had been sure that Sophie's would be open. Open and accusing, as they had been for six months.

Illustration by Tim Foley

Ray tugged at Anna's arm. Ignoring him, Anna stared at the purple dress the undertaker had fitted so carefully round the thin corpse.

Only a week ago, she had taken in the seams, cutting out swaths of silk, reducing the dress to fit Sophie's now worn figure. She had sewn the white lace back on again with stitches so delicate they were invisible. Ray tugged again.

The banks of red roses on the side of the coffin blurred before Anna's eyes. The insurance money had bought the flowers. Their sweet smell mingled with the pungent incense the priest had wafted round the coffin. Gaggling, Anna turned away.

She slipped into the row of chairs behind three mourners, one of whom twisted a rosary round her fingers. Anna hadn't brought her rosary.

One of the women turned round. "Sophie looks lovely," she said, her raspy whisper drawing the attention of four rows of viewers come to see the once beautiful Sophie. "So thin, just like when she was young. Hard to believe it's her."

Anna said nothing. Sophie looks like a shadow, she thought. Ill and worn. She had wanted to look majestic in her purple dress. The purple dress. Anna closed her eyes. She had felt the cool purple silk slide over her hands six months ago when Sophie had shown her the dress. Even then, a warning had pricked her fingers. But she hadn't understood. She didn't know then how quietly greed and murder could slip into one's bones.

The big pink rose on the woman's black hat bobbed up and down. "I know how much you did for Sophie these last months," the woman rasped again. "It's a blessing for you both that she's gone. Did you pick out the dress?"

Anna tightened her jaw, and leaned toward the woman. "Sophie bought the dress. I just fixed it, that's all. I did what I had to do. No more. No less."

The pink rose flew up, then dipped down. "Oh," the woman said, and turned back toward the coffin.

Anna looked at Ray. He reached for her hand. Only he understood. Not even Milly knew. Only Ray knew what she had really done to Sophie.

Milly, Anna thought. Milly's young face, her blue eyes, and golden brown hair, like Anna's own. Even now, Anna knew she would still rob Sophie of everything for Milly. For Ray, too. And for herself. Condemning Sophie to her destined death had made

her honest enough to admit that. And she knew that she would send Sophie to her death all over again if it were necessary.

Sophie had laid her trap carefully, but in the end, it had closed on Sophie herself. Anna swept a loose hair away from her forehead. Sophie had tried to trap her, but she had escaped.

The president of the Holy Cross Society took her place in front of the coffin and began to lead her group in prayer. Their voices droned on.

Anna tried to remember when the trap had first begun to close. She remembered the photo.

**T**he photo had been crooked again. Anna wiped a hand on her apron and straightened it. She touched the picture again even though it was perfectly straight now. Probably the house had faded too, like the yellowed photo. She and Ray hadn't seen the house for years. Silly to keep the old photo. But maybe now there was hope.

Anna plunged her hand back into the hot dishwater. She and Ray would have to paint the eaves on their own house before winter. If the eaves were blue, the siding wouldn't look so gray. Everything in the valley looked gray, especially in winter when the flowers were gone, the trees bare, and you couldn't get out because the mountain roads slicked over with ice and locked Pottsville into the valley.

Out the kitchen window, the sun's rays fanned out like a halo from behind the mountain. Here in the valley, the sun disappeared early. Anna wondered if the sun were still shining on that white house over the mountain, as it had been the day Ray had taken the photo.

"The dog got over into Sophie's yard again." Ray's voice boomed from the front door.

Anna grimaced.

"You gotta keep an eye on him when Milly's not home, Anna. Lucky thing I saw Corky before Sophie did. She would have called the pound, or smashed his head with a brick. She's big enough to do it. Big enough to kill an ox."

Anna reached for a towel to dry her hands and turned on the burner to heat the water.

Ray dropped two grocery bags on the table. "Coffee ready?" He sat down and stretched his legs out, lifting the bad one up to the other chair.

"Will be in a minute." Anna set a cup on the table in front of Ray. "I forgot to tie the dog when Milly left."

"Slackin' on the job lately, aren't ya?"

Anna glared at Ray. "I've had my hands full with Milly so sick again. Besides, you were supposed to watch the dog."

Ray grinned sheepishly and flipped his hat to the top of the refrigerator. "Take it easy. Milly's gonna be okay, now, and the dog didn't come to any harm."

Anna's long fingers pulled at a stray strand of gold-brown hair. She tucked it back firmly into its pin. "I'm sorry, Ray. We both should have watched. If Corky had gone into Sophie's yard . . . Just don't tell Milly we forgot."

"I won't tell." Ray thumped his other leg onto the chair and grinned at Anna. "Anyway, if he had gone into Sophie's yard, nothing would have happened."

Anna stared at her husband. "Nothing! What are you talking about? You said yourself Sophie threatened to call the pound. Milly would die if we had to tie up Corky." Behind Anna, the coffee pot began to gurgle.

"Get the coffee. Then I'll tell you what I saw Sophie do."

Anna poured, and hastily wiped up the bit of coffee that spilled on her mother's maple table. She sat down in Milly's chair. "What did you see? Were you talking to Sophie before you left?"

"Couldn't talk to her. She went out. I saw her go. So she wouldn't have seen the dog."

"Oh," Anna said, a little disappointed. She didn't like gossip, but she would have welcomed some news to break the routine of her days. "Her nephew take her someplace?"

"Nope. She went in a taxi."

Anna dropped back against the chair. Ray looked awfully smug. "Is this one of your jokes, Ray?"

"Nope. Went in a taxi. I watched her. And that ain't all, either."

"Where did she go?"

"How do I know? She didn't tell me. Didn't tell you either, eh, Anna? Did you see her this morning?"

"Yes. She didn't say anything about going anyplace." Why hadn't the old woman asked Ray or her nephew to take her wherever she was going? She always did. Demanded it, in fact.

"Maybe she went to the bank. Finally got scared and stashed away all that bribe money she's supposed to have tucked in that house somewhere." Ray laughed. "Maybe the old witch finally

heard the kids talking about knocking her out and robbing her."

Anna flushed. She rose, her back stiff. "Stop that, Ray. How many times do I have to tell you not to talk like that? If she has money, you don't have to go round spreading it." She turned back to the sink, took out the cleanser, shook it onto the dull porcelain, and scrubbed. She didn't want to listen to any talk about Sophie's getting robbed. Sophie couldn't get robbed. Not now. God, not now.

"I don't know why you're always so worried about her getting robbed. She never treated you so nice, and after all the grocery shopping and dishwashing you've done for her. To say nothing of the meals you make for her. You should've never started all that."

"I guess not. But she didn't have anybody. My mother didn't have anybody in Pittstown either, before she died. She was alone. Anyway, I don't want to talk about my helping Sophie. I started and I can't stop now."

"Okay, Anna. But you couldn't help your mother's suffering. You were holding us all together then, what with my accident and Milly just a baby and sick at that. She needed care."

And still does, Anna thought. More than ever. "Well, I started with Sophie, and I can't stop now," she said again. "So that's an end of it."

"Okay, okay," Ray said. "But Sophie has her nephew, you know."

"Eddie's mean," Anna said.

"Just like Sophie. Takes right after her." Ray chuckled. "Remember how hoppin' mad Eddie was when she wouldn't give him the money to open that laundry business? 'Course, she was probably right. He would have lost it all anyway."

Anna sighed. Ray was worse than the kids, spreading stories about Sophie's money. Somebody might take heed and rob her.

Anna poured more green cleanser on the already clean sink and rubbed it round. For years she hadn't believed that Sophie had any money from her in-laws. Not until a month ago when Sophie, eyes glittering, showed her a tin box, hinting that she might leave its contents to Anna. That day, she had begun to think, as if some scorpion had lodged in her brain and stung it over and over again. That day, from the back of her dresser, she had taken the photo of the house she and Ray had always wanted and hung it by the sink. If Ray would just keep quiet, maybe, maybe . . .

"She doesn't have any money, Ray," Anna said.

"Okay, so if she doesn't have money and she didn't go to the bank, where did she go?"



"I don't know. How would I know?" Anna watched the green cleanser swirl down the drain. Sophie never used a taxi, never spent a dime she didn't have to. She must have gone somewhere she didn't want anyone to know about. Then Anna remembered. She turned to Ray.

"Was she wearing a purple dress?"

Ray stopped stirring his coffee. "Purple dress? I don't know. The old miser had on that coat she always wears. I think." He shrugged. "Is the coat purple?"

"No." Anna heard Ray mumble something, but she didn't ask what. Yesterday, when she had stopped by Sophie's to pick up the laundry, Anna had gone upstairs at Sophie's request. From a large brown trunk, she had pulled out a purple dress. Silk it had been. Real silk. It flowed over Anna's long hands like pure spring water. The white lace collar had yellowed a bit, and at first Anna thought the dress to be from Sophie's youth. But it was large, very large, and Sophie had been very slim when she was young, and even at thirty-four when her husband died. Then Anna had noticed the little tag with the seamstress's name, and the price. Sophie had never worn the dress. It had lain in the trunk the past several years, waiting for something. Anna had hung the dress in the closet downstairs as Sophie had told her to do.

"Dreamin' out that window again. What do you see out there lately? You gonna tell me someday?"

Anna started. "I was just thinking."

"Well, don't you want to know?"

"Know what?"

Ray shook his head. "When you get in one of those dreamin' moods, you don't hear nothin', do you? I told you, I saw the old lady do somethin' else weird."

Anna went back to Milly's chair. "What, Ray?"

"Curious now, huh?"

"Ray!" He was a kind and gentle husband, and it was not his fault that eleven years ago a mining accident had torn his leg muscles. And it wasn't his fault that his disability pension was so small. But he didn't understand. Sophie's money would rescue Milly from the valley. At thirteen, she was shy and withdrawn, as Anna herself had once been. She wouldn't marry well, or perhaps at all. Anna couldn't bear to see Milly waste her life behind the counter of some local card shop. She summoned patience. "Yes, Ray, I am curious," she said.

"Just now, when I was comin' back from the store. Guess what the old lady was doing?"

"I don't know. Tell me." Anna knew it was no use to rush Ray. He'd only hold out longer.

"I peeked in the parlor window when I saw the light on." Ray grinned. "Just makin' sure it was her come back in the house, and not one of them kids, lootin' the place."

Anna bit her lip.

"She ain't worth peekin' at for no other reason any more," Ray continued, leaning back against the wall. "And all them pictures of herself from the thirties she has hanging on the walls only make her look sillier today. Like those before and after ads, only the wrong way round." Ray laughed. "She sure did like herself. Good thing, maybe, if her in-laws hated her as much as everybody says they did."

"Tell me what you saw, Ray."

"Oh, yeah. Like I said, she had a light on. But it wasn't just that big old lamp she had lit. I thought the light was kinda funny, flickerin' like. Old Sophie had a candle lit. One of them big fat candles? She'd just lit it. Now what the hell is she doin' lightin' candles? Do you suppose she's goin' religious? Some people do when they get that old."

Anna's fingers curled with the icy feeling that crept into them. For weeks now, she'd had a heavy feeling of doom at Sophie's. The very air at Sophie's house seemed to pull at her. Or maybe the tugging weight came from Sophie's eyes that clamped onto her back when she swept the little porch, or warmed up a meal. The money. Why had Sophie shown her the money? And why had she mentioned Milly? She'd never noticed Milly before. Maybe Milly will go to college one day, Sophie had taunted. She's a bookworm, and there it won't matter how awkward she is.

The money, Anna thought, sitting up straight. And the purple dress. All silk and lace. Surely Sophie wasn't going to marry again. What would happen to the money if she married?

Anna blinked.

"You listening, Anna?"

She nodded.

"Well, that's what I think," Ray said smugly. "She's goin' crazy. Maybe you oughta stay away from her, Annie. Let that lazy nephew of hers take care of her. Old fat Sophie's never done anything for you, and after all you've done for her." Ray grinned again. "Still thinks she's a looker, too. But I don't care what they say. I can't

see that that old witch was every any ravin' beauty with that pitch black hair." He reached for Anna's soft hair. "Not like you, baby."

His hand caressed her hair and cheek. A tress pulled loose from its clip and fell over her cheek. She'd worn it loose and gently curled when they had courted and married. "I guess I'm no beauty any more either," she said, "if ever I was."

"You were," Ray said. "And you still are, Annie. Beautiful and good." The skin round Ray's eyes twitched. "You deserved better, Annie. I . . ."

"I've told you I don't want to hear that kind of talk." Anna reached for his hand.

"Jesus, your hands are cold. You're not gettin' sick, now, are you, Annie? Like Milly?"

Anna pulled her hand away, and looked up at the gay little cuckoo clock that had been an extravagant gift from Ray. She jumped up. "You know I never get sick. I'd better go and get Milly. I don't want her walkin' home from her class alone."

"I'll get her."

"No, I promised her the two of us would go into that new place for a sundae."

"Well, I'll come along."

Anna removed her apron. "I think Milly might want to talk. You know, about the drawing class tonight. She was so nervous. It took her a week to get the courage to sign up." Anna sighed. "I wish I could talk her into going to the school dances, too. She's starting to blossom out now. She's so pretty, but she doesn't know it. I wish I could get her some nice clothes."

Ray swung his legs down, lifting his damaged one slowly, and took his coffee cup to the sink. He dumped out the cold liquid. It splashed up the back of the sink. He stared at it. "Nobody's got it easy in this old town, unless you're a doctor."

"I know that, Ray." Anna put her hand on Ray's shoulder. "Put the groceries away for me before you start on your woodwork, okay? It's getting dark. I have to go get Milly."

She reached for a blue jacket that hung on the hook of the kitchen door. Its new gold buttons shone brightly against the old fabric. I must help them, she thought. Milly and Ray.

His eyes softened, Ray watched her put her jacket on. "Okay," he said. "Have a good talk with Milly."

Anna grabbed her little change purse and started for the side door.

"Annie," Ray called. "Take a look in the old lady's parlor. See

if she's got that candle burnin' yet."

Anna pulled the jacket tighter round herself. "I will. Bye."

Outside, a gust of wind blew the stray strand of Anna's hair across her eyes, then died down abruptly. Anna paused on the steps and sniffed. A burning odor tinged the evening air. She looked across the long stretch of her back garden toward a neighbor's house. Directly across from Anna, a dim light glowed from the kitchen window, on whose white shade Mr. Milnich was silhouetted. He would be reading the evening paper, alone as always. The chrysanthemums in his gardens swayed a little. Mr. Milnich loved gardening. Anna guessed that her own yellow and red chrysanthemums would die with her. Unless Milly... But Milly wouldn't have to stay here, in this old mining patch that still looked like a company row no matter how much siding and how many porches and windows had been added to the houses over the years. Maybe Milly wouldn't have to stay.

Anna stepped down to the sidewalk gingerly, avoiding the new patch of concrete Ray had just put in that morning. She paused again. From here, she could see down the walk to Sophie's house and Gordon Street beyond. The light from the front window nearest the street diffused over the grass beside the house.

A thump behind Anna startled her. An apple had dropped from the tree there. She'd have to set Milly to work tomorrow, picking up the fallen fruit. They could make pies together.

Anna peered down the walk again. The dim light from Sophie's window strengthened, then wavered again. Ray was right. A lamp light would have been steady. Sophie had a candle burning. The light from Sophie's window flickered again, a formless wraith hovering between Anna and the street.

Another apple plopped to the ground and, in a second, hit Anna's foot. She watched the apple roll across the walk onto the grass, then bent, picked it up, and started down the walk holding the apple between her hands. How solid and real it felt.

A small car pulled into the driveway across the street. Stan Zadoch, coming home from his hardware store. Anna watched him close his car door and disappear around the back. There in the kitchen his family would be gathering for supper. No one else would come by at this end of the street. Mr. Milnich might see her looking into Sophie's window, but he wouldn't care. He'd think she was checking on Sophie to make sure she was all right.

Anna dropped the apple into her pocket and put a hand on the

rail of the chain link fence that encircled Sophie's yard. The iron felt cold. For a second, she clung to it as if it were a lifesaver, then let go and walked to Sophie's gate. It swung open with only a low swish like the brush of a branch against a window. Anna paused and waited. Like a thief, she thought.

She let the gate click softly shut and stepped onto the grass. Her nostrils stung. The burning odor hung more thickly here. Pressing against the fence, she moved past two kitchen windows and the mums that she herself had planted. Frowning, she turned and looked back. The windows were open. Anna's throat tightened. Sophie never kept her windows open beyond September, not even in midafternoon, much less in the evening.

Moving quickly to the edge of the front window, open like the others, Anna leaned to the side, craning her neck. The sheer white curtains were parted, and through them, she saw Sophie.

Sophie's dark blue back, huge and straight, seemed to fill the room. Her long gray hair flared out, a stiff, curly, tangled mass. Above the table where Sophie sat, photos hung: a young Sophie, daughter of a miner, tall and slender. A black-haired beauty in the full glory of her marriage to the son of the owner of the Mountain Coal Mine.

Anna moved to the middle of the window, putting her foot down softly.

From above Sophie's gray massive head, a wisp of smoke rose. Another curled up, chasing the first and spreading like a fog above Sophie's head and over the photos. Sophie's arm moved. Light flickered over the wall, and another thicker curl of smoke wound up toward the ceiling.

Anna followed its ascent, until it disappeared, escaping through the open window just above Sophie's head.

It was then that Sophie's dark blue back moved. Above it, the gray entwined mass quivered. Anna stared, mesmerized, as if she were confronting her own doom in this massive bulk. Then, like some mountain come to life, the blue back seemed to rise higher and higher. It threatened to bury her, to roll her into itself, to take her into its rocky being.

Her feet were bound to the earth. She raised her hand, making the sign of the cross. Choking, as if some band had wound round her throat, she gasped at the air, until a little cry broke free. The blue mountain turned. Anna fled, grabbing at the cold iron fence that led to the open street.

Down the walk and across the street she ran, into the steady glow of a street light, and leaned against the post. Breathing deeply, she felt the band round her throat open and drop away.

She looked toward Sophie's house. The flickering light from the window disappeared. In a moment, a square of light materialized on the grass and held steady. Sophie had turned on a lamp.

Anna leaned her head back against the street light. She wasn't sure what had frightened her. Sophie's tangled hair? She'd brushed it herself, many times. That sudden rise of Sophie's bulk. That was it. The old woman had seemed so big, so powerful, so relentless. Like some monstrous idol, demanding the soul of its victim.

She thrust her cold hands into her pockets. Against her right palm, the apple felt round and smooth. She drew it out and rubbed it. A good apple, red and ripe and hard. She felt foolish. Superstitious, Ray would have said. Stupid, she told herself. But even as she berated her fear, she felt it rise again and spread through her arms and legs until they felt heavy and frozen. Her whole body tightened and she strained as if against the pull of something irrevocable, something that would change forever the way she and Milly laughed and chatted, the way she and Ray loved each other.

Slowly, she looked up again at Sophie's place. A slightly acrid odor still tainted the air even this distance from the house. Anna frowned. Candles smelled pleasant. And they didn't usually smoke. What had the old woman been doing?

The light from Sophie's window disappeared. The back mountain loomed over the patch of former company houses. Anna shuddered, staring at the dark square of Sophie's house, the house to which Sophie had returned after her husband's death, bearing, like a treasure hoard, the money she had extracted from his family.

Did it still lie hidden in that dark square, just as the children said? She leaned toward the house, giving in to the tug of its invisible ropes.

"Tomorrow," she whispered. "When she's gone. Then, I'll go in. For Milly." She dropped the apple back into her pocket, and started toward the school. Milly was waiting.

Not until she and Milly turned up the walk toward the house again did Anna dare think about Sophie. Milly had been flushed with excitement. Fumbling a little with the papers, she displayed the drawings she had done that evening in class. On one, she had caught the tension in the muscled strength of a fellow student in thick black lines of charcoal. The teacher had liked it.



"We're going to do portraits," Milly said. "I started mine tonight, but I don't know if I can, Mom. I mean, a finished picture. Sketches are all I've ever done."

Anna had reached for Milly's hand. "The teacher will help you, Milly. That's why she's there."

Milly bit her lip, but she nodded. "I'll try, but it's scary, Mom, drawing right there in front of everyone. I've only drawn for you."

"You'll do just fine." Anna hid her worry. She had to help Milly get over her fears and finish the course. Milly wanted this, and if she failed, she might give up and withdraw into her shyness completely. Anna didn't know enough to tell whether Milly had talent or not, but that didn't matter. If the course made Milly happy, then it would be worth the scrimping on household money.

With Milly chatting about the class, they walked home. Just at Gordon Street, a damp chill seemed to seep up from the ground. Anna pulled her jacket closed.

A light glowed again from Sophie's window. Anna watched, but the light did not waver.

She heard Milly's chatter only dimly. They turned up the walk. The sharp sloping roofs etched against the pale moonlight were the unmistakable signatures of mining company houses. Years ago, she and Ray thought they would move out someday, out into the new world, away from the dying mines. But the mines had closed and caught Ray's leg in their own collapse.

In the light from Sophie's window, Anna stopped. Milly's chatter died away. Anna could see the door to the closet where Sophie kept her shiny tin box.

Milly tugged and they started up the walk again, past Sophie's kitchen. Behind them, the side door of Sophie's house slammed. Anna swung round.

Sophie's nephew took the three steps in a single bound. He stopped when he saw Anna and Milly, glared, and then turned toward the street. The greeting died on Anna's lips. She didn't like Eddie any more than he liked her.

She and Milly had taken only a few steps when Eddie called.

"Anna, wait a minute." He strode up to them.

Anna tensed when she saw Eddie's eyes sweep over Milly. "What is it?" she asked, moving in front of her daughter.

Eddie's eyes narrowed to black crevices in his hard gray face. "Have you spoken to her today?" He jerked his head toward the house.

"Not today. Why?"

Eddie chewed on the side of his mouth for a second, pulling in one cheek. It made him seem curiously unbalanced, as if he would tip over at any moment. "Has she seemed strange lately?"

Anna hesitated. She wanted to get Milly away from Eddie, but she stayed still, as if she were blinded by the glitter of the tin box and the purple silk. "Well, I'm not sure I'd say strange."

"Then what would you say?"

"Why do you ask?"

Eddie glared. Then, suddenly, his lips lifted into what could pass for a smile. The skin pulled taut over his sharp cheekbones. "Okay, let's get it out. You hang around here just about every day. How sick has she been?"

Anna blinked and felt her own skin tighten. "She has a cough, that's all." The taxicab, she thought. Was Sophie ill? Had she gone to a doctor?

"She was over at your place earlier today, wasn't she?"

Anna blinked again. She felt a little dizzy. "No. She never comes over. Never. Not in years," she sputtered in surprise. Sophie went nowhere. Eddie knew that, she was sure. She looked at him sharply, but his black eyes were like stones. They revealed nothing.

"Ray took her someplace, didn't he?" Eddie jerked his head toward Mr. Milnich's house. "That's what Milnich said."

"It wasn't Ray." Anger and frustration rose in Anna and crept into her voice. She felt Milly's hand press on her arm. "Why did Mr. Milnich say that? She went out. But Ray didn't take her. Neither did I. I don't know why Mr. Milnich said Ray did. It isn't true." She felt as if the neighbors all knew what she planned.

"Are you telling me she walked somewhere?"

"No. She took a taxi."

Suddenly, in the dim light, Eddie's black eyes glistened. Anna stepped backwards into Milly. Milly stumbled.

Eddie's voice exploded. "How do you know that?"

"Ray. . . ." Anna cut off her words. "I saw her."

Eddie took two steps toward Anna. "Don't tell me you don't know what's going on. Where did she go? To a doctor? Were you snooping around?" His face loomed uncomfortably near hers, like a black cloud blocking out the light.

Anna felt as if he could see into her brain, into the corner where she had lodged her plans. "I told you, I don't know where she went." Anna yanked back a stray lock of hair. "Why did Mr. Milnich say

Ray took her someplace? Why? It isn't true."

Eddie's eyes dulled again. "Well, I confess he didn't exactly say that. When I called Sophie and didn't get an answer, I called Milnich and he told me the house looked empty. That's all. I figured she must have gone somewhere with you or Ray."

Hot anger flushed over Anna. For years she'd endured Eddie's sly insults. Now, he'd tried to trick her. She turned on her heel, and pulled at Milly's arm. Milly looked pale.

"All right, wait a minute," Eddie said. "Look, something is up with Sophie. We ought to work together, not fight each other. At least till we see what she wants."

Anna felt herself pulled back. "What do you mean?"

Eddie smiled. "She wants us both over at her place tomorrow afternoon."

Anna blinked, trying to absorb Eddie's words. "Both of us?"

Eddie put his hands in his pockets and rocked back on his heels. "That's what she said tonight. I admit I was as flabbergasted as you are."

Anna stared at Sophie's door. "She's said nothing to me."

Eddie shrugged. "She said she'd call you tonight. Said she's made some decisions about her estate, as she called it. Says she wants to explain. She wouldn't say what she decided." His guttural laugh echoed into the chill air. "No matter what I threatened."

Eddie threw a hard look back at Sophie's house. Anna pulled Milly's hand tighter under her arm.

When Eddie looked back, his face was smooth again, but the muscles were tight. "So you see what I mean. Maybe we ought to work together. Tell each other what we know. I've told you. She's sick. You didn't know that. Maybe there's some things Sophie's done recently that you know?"

Anna's instincts raised a red flag. "Just the taxi. That's all." She edged back. "I have to get Milly in. It's cold out here."

"Just a minute, Anna. What's frightened you?"

A movement at the window of the house caught Anna's eyes. A curtain fluttered back into place over a dark blue mass.

She stared, repulsed and frozen again, jerking when she felt Eddie's hand on her arm. Violently, she pulled away. He looked surprised.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Milly's been ill," Anna muttered. "I have to get home."

Eddie looked at Milly. His mouth opened slightly.

Anna turned, drawing Milly with her.

Eddie's voice chased after her. "She said if we didn't come tomorrow, we needn't bother to come any more."

Anna didn't stop. She had to get back home, to Ray, to someone sane and whole. At her door, her shaking fingers rattled the knob.

An hour later, Milly still looked pale, and Anna's throat still hurt.

At three in the morning, Anna lay wide awake. When the floor in the hallway creaked, she stiffened. Milly. Creeping into the bathroom, in the dark. Anna listened intently. After a few minutes, Milly stole back into her room. She wasn't ill. Anna released her muscles. Beside her, Ray snored softly.

Anna shifted her leg. She'd heard the rumors lately. The swimming pool plant might leave town. What erratic work he had there now might be gone. Maybe the post office job would come through. But that wasn't sure. A lot of men had applied.

Anna looked at the clock. Three thirty now. She had to do it tomorrow, or she might never have another chance.

At seven, Sophie would leave for seven thirty mass. She hadn't missed it in years. The cronies her own age were there: those who had admired her fifty years ago when she had married the mine owner's son in white splendor; and those who had hated her for her arrogance and who had clucked and laughed when she had moved back into her father's house, paid off by her in-laws.

She didn't wear expensive clothes now, and she wasn't beautiful any more. But still, she was the widow of the mine owner's son. She'd taken the front pew in the church for years, and even the young didn't dare dislodge her. Sophie claimed it as her right.

Anna squinted at the dim outline of the armoire that held her cotton dresses. She didn't hate Sophie as the others did. When she had first started to help Sophie, she had listened to the old woman's stories of Philadelphia and its parties with pleasure, not jealousy. Maybe she'd begun to wonder even then if Sophie would leave her some money, long before she saw it. Anna didn't know when she'd begun to hope. But she knew when she'd seen the money that she wanted it.

It was hers. She'd earned it. No one else had a right to it. Especially not Eddie.

Anna looked toward the window. A dark square. The sun hadn't begun to rise yet.

Three more hours. Then Sophie would leave with Mr. Milnich as usual. Anna stiffened when Ray shifted. What would she tell him? But that didn't matter.

Sophie had called, just as Eddie said she would. "Come over at two," she had told Anna.

"Too late then," Anna whispered into the darkness. Her voice startled her. She looked at Ray, but he did not stir.

Milly had to have it. Milly needed pretty clothes; she'd need a gown for her prom. And makeup, and a perm. Milly could be pretty. And college. She could go to college, move away. Away from this valley. She could live in a white house like the one across the mountain. They could all live in a white house.

Anna turned and tugged at the drawer in her bedstand. Ray grunted and rolled over. Her hand poised, Anna waited until he had settled. This time the drawer opened smoothly. She felt round inside, toward the back, past the tissues and the flashlight. Her fingers closed over the envelope and she pulled it out. Softly, by inches, the drawer rolled shut.

In the dim light from the window, the envelope shone, shiny and smooth like the silk. Anna opened it and removed the key, Sophie's key. A month ago she hadn't known why she'd kept it. Knowing Sophie had forgotten about it, she had folded it into the white envelope and tucked it into the drawer. Like fate, Anna thought. Inescapable fate. She twisted the key round and round, then slid it under her pillow.

Five o'clock. Anna laid her head on the pillow, facing the clock. Two and a half hours. She'd stay awake. Her eyes felt like hard round pebbles. Unable to blink, even to shed a tear.

This Sunday she would steal. Steal an old woman's money. But it was hers. It was. She had to have it.

No one would know. No one would see. She slid her hand under the pillow and closed it over the key.

At seven twenty, Anna stepped inside and pushed shut the side door of Sophie's house and leaned against it. The kitchen was cold and damp. Sophie had not turned on the heat.

Anna shivered against the door. She closed her eyes and swallowed, letting her own warm saliva slide over her constricted throat. At the sound of a sharp click, her eyes popped open. She bit down on her lip, and then released it when she recognized the noise. It was the drip from the faucet onto the stainless steel sink.

She'd heard it a million times, she guessed. Why did it seem so loud now? As if it echoed through the whole neighborhood.

She went to the sink and pushed at the faucets. But the drip fell again. She turned on the faucets, and jammed them off as hard as she could. Still the sharp drip. Leave it, she told herself, steadying her cold hands against the counter's edge.

She turned toward Sophie's bedroom at the front of the house, licking the drop of blood from her bitten lip. Oddly, the warm salty taste calmed her. She sucked at it. It seemed the only real sensation.

The walls of the bedroom, in a faded blue wallpaper, seemed to crowd close together. The brown shades hugged the windows, blocking any outside light.

Anna went to raise a shade, then jerked her hand back. The bedclothes lay in a jumbled mass, almost as if Sophie were still in them. A white clock with a face that glowed blue chimed once. Seven thirty. At mass, the priest would be intoning the first hymn. Anna bit at her lip again, and flinched with the pain. She wouldn't think about mass.

She would do what she had to do and think later. She switched on a lamp. From her pocket she pulled out Ray's long slender screwdriver. Months ago, when Ray had had to break open a cabinet door, she had watched carefully. Perhaps she had known, even then.

She fumbled at the flimsy lock on the closet door, listening to the ticks of the clock on Sophie's bedstand. The screwdriver dug into the soft wood of the door jamb. Anna yanked it out and clutched the handle tightly, willing her hands to hold steady. She inserted the screwdriver slowly between the latch and the strike. When she felt the edge of the latch, she pushed steadily. The screwdriver slipped. Again she inserted it.

In minutes she worked the screwdriver back and forth enough to trip the latch. The door yielded to her tug.

Inside the closet, the tin box sat on the top shelf. A green tin box with a shiny chrome lock. Anna reached up. As she slid the box toward her and tipped it down, the lock tumbled to the floor and lay between her feet. Anna froze. Then, pushing the box back onto the shelf, she bent down and picked up the lock. It gleamed in her palm, like some ancient artifact whose ritual meaning couldn't be deciphered. Why had the lock been open?

Anna's nerves deadened and her arms fell to her sides. She knew.



She'd known yesterday, but she had pushed the knowledge away, exiling it to some recess of her brain where it had twisted and turned, trying to gnaw its way out.

She closed her hands over the lock, pressing it against her flesh. A talisman if rubbed properly would divert disaster. Slowly, Anna opened her palms, then bent and put the lock on the floor where it had fallen. She rose, feeling as if some string in her back pulled her up against her will. When her arms lifted to the box, she felt surprised to see them.

The box was light. As she brought it down toward herself, she flared her nostrils. The acrid odor from last night. She carried the box to the bed and sat down. The biting odor filled her head, her ears, her eyes. It tore at her throat, suffocating her. It took the heart and breath from her, leaving her heavy and dull.

With great effort, she began to lift the lid as if she were performing some final, some irreversible act.

The ashes were spread evenly in the box. A pearly gray plain, dead and void. In the left corner, a bit of green paper protruded.

Anna stared, feeling nothing.

She bit down on her lip. Then, down through the rock, like a trickle of water, cut a thin line of relief. She couldn't steal the money. She didn't have to find some dark hole to hide it. She didn't have to turn a hard gray face to Milly, to Ray, to her own mirror. "It's over," she whispered.

"What's over?"

The voice came from the outside world. Puzzled, Anna looked up at the bedroom door.

Eddie's eyes, unblinking, fixed on the tin box. He moved toward Anna.

"It's over," Anna repeated.

Eddie stopped, his face shifting, pulling to one side, unbalanced. "The witch burned it, didn't she?" he said. "God damn her, she burned it."

From somewhere in the house, something clicked. Anna listened again for the sound. How lovely a click could sound, she thought. Like something alive, something from the world, the world that could move and speak and act.

Eddie still stared at the ash.

An immense shadow filled the doorway like a door closing on an ancient tomb.

The object was too big for Anna to see, too big to comprehend.

She could see only a black halo on gray spiraled hair.

Eddie turned to face the shadow. Anna wanted to ask him if he saw the halo, too.

The huge black object moved into the room.

Sophie, Anna's brain registered. Sophie, with a black halo. Was she dead?

"So you have both come." Sophie's voice rasped over Anna. "Both, to steal."

Anna blinked, but the black halo was still there, the gray serpents beneath it.

"I burned it. I burned it." Sophie's voice, ecstatic, seemed to fling itself against the walls. "You won't live off me. Neither of you will live off what was mine."

The room contracted. Anna's throat ached.

"Fools." The black arcs beneath Sophie's eyes repeated the pattern of the black halo on her head. The high voice shrieked out again. "Vultures, waiting for me to die. Plotting together outside my window. Now you'll live on filth and garbage, like the creatures you are. All night I waited on you. All night." She began to laugh. "I knew you would sneak in. But I didn't expect both of you at once. Both of you, coming to steal ashes." Her body shook with laughter.

Anna gasped for air.

"You'd like to kill me, wouldn't you. Both of you." The black mass that was Sophie moved toward a dresser. She pulled a drawer open, took something out, and dropped it on the dresser top. It fell with a thud.

"Take it," Sophie said. "Take it, and kill me if you have the backbone."

Anna stared at the gun. Her throat burned. She longed to scream, but she couldn't. Nor could she move her legs. All the universe had wound down to this prison. No one existed beyond Sophie, and no place existed beyond this room. The door to the room had melted into the walls. No exit.

Suddenly, the universe shook. Sophie thundered to the floor under Eddie's weight, flung upon her in a sudden mad explosion. Anna leapt up, the tin box falling at her feet. She felt a soft cloud bury her ankles and she stood, rooted.

Horried, she stared at the black halo that had flown from Sophie's head. It lay by the dresser, like the crown of some evil monarch dethroned.

The guttering sound filled her ears, as if the very walls were

tearing themselves from their fixed place.

Eddie jerked back and forth in a hypnotic rhythm.

The clock on the bedstand chimed. Time began again. Anna stumbled to the dresser where her hand closed over the gun. She turned, aiming it at the black mass on the floor.

Filth and garbage. Sophie's words echoed in her head. She raised her left hand to the gun. Vultures, scavenging, stealing.

Eddie jerked again, his hands pressing into the huge neck. A rasp escaped from Sophie's throat. Her hair writhed. Another rasp. Filth and garbage. Vultures. Living off other people. Fighting over offal.

Anna raised the gun, leaned against the dresser, aimed carefully, and pulled the trigger.

The edge of the dresser jammed into her back, and the explosion burst in her head.

Eddie flew back into the bedpost, eyes and mouth opened wide.

A gargling came from the black mass on the floor. It heaved.

Eddie groaned. From his left shoulder, a dark trickle of blood flowed. "What the hell," he gasped, clutching at the wound. "What?"

Anna watched Sophie drag herself toward the wall. The cavernous eyes glared. "Shoot me. Go ahead." Her voice was sandpaper.

Sophie's leg jerked. "Shoot me."

Anna looked down. By the leg, the black halo lay. Only it wasn't a halo. It was only a hat. A sad old woman's black feathered hat.

"Shoot the bitch." Eddie's face twisted. "Shoot her, you bitch."

Anna began to breathe again. Her throat stopped burning. Filth, she thought. Filth and garbage. She turned to the phone on the dresser.

"What are you doing?" Eddie hissed.

Anna's fingers found the right holes and the dial turned, a winged messenger to the sane outside world. "You'd better come over to Sophie's," she told Ray. "Come right away. Don't wake Milly."

"Shoot me."

Anna felt a cold sponge wrap round her ankle. She looked down at Sophie's hand and jerked her foot away.

A low laugh broke from Eddie. He grabbed at his shoulder and leaned against the bed. "You are a fool. Don't you know? Didn't you guess? She has cancer. She wants one of us to kill her. That's why she burned it, after she'd lured us with it. To throw it in our faces. She hates us both. She won't let anyone have her money.

She's afraid to wait for death, and she's afraid to kill herself, the old coward. She wants one of us to do it." He winced and then laughed again. "Maybe you're smarter than I am. You've fixed her. She'll have to suffer now."

Anna recoiled against the dresser. Cancer. That huge body wasting and shrinking. The purple dress, she thought. A funeral dress. If Sophie lived only to rot away, it wouldn't fit. She would not lie in her purple silk, her royal robe.

"Shoot," Sophie said, her voice hard and heavy, like an axe. Her eyes burned into Anna's. The gray hair rose and shivered round her huge face.

"Shoot, Anna. Do as I say. You must."

Frozen, Anna could not tear her eyes from Sophie's. If Sophie lived, the black circles round them would grow, larger and larger, until they encompassed that face. The face would shrink and the skin droop and hang. Month after month. Anna shuddered. She had come to steal and had stopped Eddie, interfering with death's path. She had come to steal, and had condemned Sophie to agony.

"Anna, shoot. You must." Sophie's eyes burned up at Anna.

Raising her arms slowly, as if they were stone, Anna aimed the gun at Sophie.

The door flew open. Anna jerked. The huge body at her feet rolled.

Mouth and eyes opened wide, Ray stared at Anna.

A low long groan tore from Sophie's mouth.

Anna aimed again.

A sound, like that of a child, came from Ray. The nerves in Anna's arms stirred and heated. Ray and Milly. Why, she thought. Why give Sophie her escape, her purple silk? She had burned Milly's escape, and in her desperation, would destroy them all.

"No," Anna said. "Face your death. You must."

She dropped the gun, stepped round Sophie, and pushed past Ray.

Behind Anna, the kitchen door did not close properly. She ignored it. Walking straight to the kitchen window, she stood and stared at the mountain. She looked at the photo of the white house. It was crooked again. It had never hung properly. She lifted it down and tore it into pieces. They felt light and smooth like silk as they slid from her fingers into the garbage can beneath the sink.

Anna dropped into a chair. She would nurse Sophie to whatever

ghastly end came. And watch those eyes grow larger and larger until they filled every dream Anna would have until her own death.

That was her revenge. And her punishment.

Slowly, she became conscious of someone in the living room doorway. Milly.

"Mother, are you all right?"

Anna swallowed, and licked at her lip. "Yes, Milly," she managed.

Milly pushed her hand from behind her back and thrust a paper at Anna.

Mechanically, Anna took it. She blinked, trying to focus. Slowly, the image cleared. Anna looked at herself. A tall, straight figure, tendrils of hair blowing round the cheeks of the slender face. The figure stood against the long window of the parlor room. Light poured through the window onto the figure and past it, into the room. There, on the side, Milly had penciled in herself, seated erect, a hand poised over a drawing pad, the face studying Anna's intently.

Anna blinked again. Milly, erect and alive. Milly, with a talent of her own, worth more than ten thousand times Sophie's money.

Anna rose. She had condemned herself to endure Sophie's eyes.

But she had not condemned Milly. She had not murdered for a tin box of ashes.

She propped the picture on the windowsill. Ray could frame it tomorrow.

Ray's hand pressed warmly against her own. The guardian candles flickered. Sophie, Anna thought, stiffening. Two women approached the casket, and Anna waited for their gasp. Then she remembered and smiled. The eyes were closed, the hair thin and limp, its coiling serpents dead, the body wasted.

But I gave the sad sick woman her purple silk, Anna thought, and brushed her hair to the end.

She lifted her head high. Medusa had not turned her to stone.

# Fun and Games at the Whacks Museum

by Elliott Capon



**H**e had two windows, one on each side of the main entrance door. Both were draped in black and purple fabrics. In the window to your left was a life-sized likeness of President Kennedy, waving and smiling and look-

*Illustration by Donald Cook*

ing like he did right before he was shot. The workmanship was so extraordinary and the tragedy so recent that ninety-nine out of a hundred people who walked past the window would swear that the president was standing there, breathing



and looking you right in the eye. In the other window was a fantasy creation, a person sort of split into two people, like Siamese twins. One half was an astonishingly lifelike representation of Anthony Perkins holding an axe, and he sort of melded into the other side of the figure, which looked like Anthony Perkins dressed as his mother, and she was wielding a large knife. It was because of this statue with its deadly cutlery that me and Pat Carter and Vince Riposo and all the other kids referred to the place as Berrigan's "Whacks" Museum.

All this took place in the town of Bellerive, which was French for Pretty River, though of course the French had sold the place to John Adams or Andrew Jackson long before the rubber processing plant turned the river into a thick syrupy mess. Bellerive wasn't a particularly small town—we had a population of around twelve thousand—but it was the kind of place where everybody kinda sorta knew each other. We had four Protestant churches, a Catholic church, an A.M.E. church, even a reform synagogue. We had a VFW, a Knights of Columbus, an American Legion, an Elks Lodge, volunteer first aid squads at each end of town, and any number of PTA's. Everybody belonged to something or other,

and everybody, if not known by everybody else, was at least known by *somebody* else. Several years later, I read a book called *Siege* by Edwin Corley, and one line has stuck with me for almost thirty years now: "He was aware of being black, just as Les Clayton was aware of being a redhead; so far it had not meant much more than that." That pretty much describes Bellerive. My father was chairman of the Brotherhood at the synagogue, and my best friend, Pat Carter, was colored, and my other best friend, Vince, went to Catholic school. But the differences didn't mean anything. There *were* no differences. To describe Bellerive as One Big Happy Family would be to sugarcoat the truth, but there was a great sense of community, of "Belleriveness," if you will.

That, I think, was one of the reasons a lot of important people did not like Mr. Berrigan.

Berrigan's Wax—or, if you were less than fifteen years of age, the Whacks—Museum might have been swallowed up in, say, New York or Los Angeles or Chicago, but in Bellerive it was quite a magnet. We had a halfway decent state park nearby, no great shakes in and of itself but coupled with a trip to Berrigan's, a day at the park made it worth packing the family in the car and driving for an

hour or so to Bellerive. So especially on weekends, and during the summer, a lot of cars would come into town, people would visit Berrigan's, and then they'd hop back in their cars for the quick ride to the park. They came from within a fifty or sixty mile radius, from towns much like Bellerive, just to see the Whacks Museum; no one came out of Berrigan's and then unloaded major shopping dollars on Frémont Street, the main shopping drag, because there was nothing on Frémont that wasn't on *their* Main Streets. The mayor, the municipal judge, the members of the Town Council—all basically decent people, I must point out—they owned a lot of the stores and businesses that adjoined Berrigan's, and you'd see them looking out their windows or biting their lips or making disgusted faces as all these people would come, pay their dollar to get into Berrigan's, and then zoom out of Bellerive without stopping off at any of the other shops along Frémont. Biggy Piggy's Family Restaurant did a little ex-Berrigan business, but most of the tourists had either packed picnic lunches or got something at the concession stand at the state park. Not that the Whacks Museum was hurting anybody, mind you, but the powers that be were resentful. That was part of it.

The second part was that Mr. Berrigan didn't belong to anything. No one knew much about him, not even us kids. He lived alone, atop the museum, and we never knew if he was a lifelong bachelor, a widower, or divorced. He didn't belong to the VFW or the Elks, would come into church (sometimes the Methodist and sometimes the Baptist) usually only on Christmas Eve, and just generally did not participate in the spirit of Belleriveness that we all held so important. He never went to Town Council meetings and never attended the volunteer fire department picnic fundraisers. Parents would drop an occasional odd remark that us kids'd pick up, and we got the impression that most of the grownups considered him an "odd fellow" or a "queer duck."

The third thing that, we gathered, the adults did not like about Mr. Berrigan was the rear room of the Whacks Museum, the one where us kids practically lived, me and Pat and Vince and all the other kids.

No one could then, or could now, deny that Mr. Berrigan was a genius at creating lifelike wax figures. He had an Elvis Presley and a John Wayne and Marilyn Monroe (with that dress blowing up) and a Superman and old Mahatma Gandhi and Jane Russell, you name them,

they were there. His statues were remarkably, astonishingly lifelike. I think Vincent Price did about a dozen movies where the wax sculptor pours wax over living people and puts them on display, but Mr. Berrigan's statues were even better than that. The man was a superlative artist; and a dozen times a day someone would inadvertently catch himself saying "Excuse me" to or asking a question of one of the statues.

That was great for the old people and the tourists, but us kids always plunked down our dollar and ran right for the rear display room, the one you had to pass through the black curtain to get to, the one with the sign that read CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

He had Frankenstein and Dracula and the Wolfman and the Mummy. He had an empty pedestal with a plaque that said "The Invisible Man." He had the Creature from the Black Lagoon and Jack the Ripper and one of the Its: either "It, The Terror from Beyond Space" or "It Came from Outer Space," I could never tell them apart. He had what were claimed to be authentic torture devices from the Spanish Inquisition on which realistic victims screamed and stared at us in agony and hopelessness. He had giant spiders and bats and rats and owls whose glass eyes glittered in

the indirect and dim light. It was spooky in that room and it was unnerving and it was sometimes, when your imagination got to running away with you, downright frightening. We loved it. The place was rarely without two or three or ten kids, screaming in delighted fright and joking and chasing each other with pretend claws extended. There was always the one with the morbid sense of curiosity who would stand for hours staring at the torture scenes. One of those, a kid I knew only peripherally, named Larry, would, sixteen years later, murder his parents and his in-laws and his wife and his sister-in-law, but I think that was just coincidence.

Kids at that age, roughly ten to fourteen, all go through the horror/SF phase. We all collected and traded comic books and *Famous Monsters of Film-land* magazine and saw the latest Japanese monster movie every Saturday afternoon at the Bristol. And nobody thought much about it.

But then people, probably important people, started whispering things, things about how the back room of Berrigan's had items that were too unnerving for young, impressionable minds to be exposed to. The whisper probably started with the mayor and the other business people along Frémont, who passed it

on to their wives, who brought it up at PTA meetings, where it got to all our parents, and then to us. They couldn't shut Berrigan's down, they couldn't prevent him from portraying movie monsters in his museum (they did shut down the dirty book store in less than two weeks), but they could prevent us kids from going in, from enriching Mr. Berrigan by thirty kids times a dollar a day two or three days a week. Our parents just simply refused to give us a dollar to get into the Whacks Museum, and the only way me or Pat or Vince could get in would be to save our total allowance for four weeks. And what, do without new comics or Heinlein paperbacks for a whole month just to see again the same statues? Sure, we loved the back room at Berrigan's, but we weren't willing to make that kind of sacrifice.

I don't know that Mr. Berrigan was being edged close to bankruptcy by the loss of revenue, but he must've been hurting, because most if not all of his mid-week cash came from us kids. It didn't take a genius to figure out what was the cause of his sudden decline in attendance. A few weeks after the ban went into effect, Mr. Berrigan took that statue of President Kennedy out of his window and replaced it with one of Mr. Hubert, the mayor.

Mr. Hubert was somewhat overweight, and tended to perspire heavily. He also had a very heavy five o'clock shadow, usually by noon. The statue Mr. Berrigan put in the window was so true to life it was uncanny. Except that the statue was a *little* more overweight than Mr. Hubert, and there were big drops of perspiration so cleverly crafted they were astonishing, and the beard stubble was just ever so slightly more pronounced than on the original model. I think if someone had signed the name "Michelangelo" on the figure, it could have stood proudly in any museum in the world.

He also turned the Norman/Mrs. Bates statue around in the other window so that it was *looking* at Mr. Hubert.

Everyone thought it was a very funny joke, everyone except the mayor, of course. But there was nothing he could do about it. Mr. Berrigan even took an ad in the *Courier*, the daily paper that covered the entire county, announcing the new display as a tribute to our fine and respected mayor.

About a week later, Pat and me (Vince wasn't there because Catholic schools were open that week, the week before Easter; he'd be off next week, when me and Pat were both back in the hell known as sixth grade) were

lounging in Boston Alley, a narrow street that ran behind and parallel to Frémont. The backs of the businesses on Frémont and those of First Street were all there was on Boston Alley; it was nothing but service entrances and garbage cans. We liked to sit there because no one ever came down it and we could pretend anything we wanted to.

This day we were playing FBI, looking for a Commie spy who had made off with the plans for the secret moon rocket and had eluded us by ducking down this alley. We were trying all the doors to see if he had entered one of the buildings. (He was going to have entered the Printrite Shop, where we were going to chase him into a vat of sophomoric acid and chalk up another victory for J. Edgar Hoover.) Pat turned the door-knob on the service entrance to the Whacks Museum . . . it turned. He pushed the door open and he looked at me. We must've looked like a negative and a print of the same picture: eyes and mouths wide open, torn between curiosity and flight. Pat decided it.

"Let's go in," he whispered.

It being a school holiday, we knew that there would be a trickling of tourists in the place, keeping Mr. Berrigan busy. So we went in. We were on a small landing, with a few steps lead-

ing up to a door we knew led to the Chamber of Horrors, and a longer flight of stairs leading downward. Mr. Berrigan knew us, of course, and if he saw us in the museum he'd know we hadn't paid to get in, so we both naturally headed down the stairs. I carefully closed the door behind us, making sure it didn't snap locked.

The staircase took a turn, and as we rounded it both of us gasped. We were in the basement of the Whacks Museum, and it looked like the dream mad scientist's laboratory.

There was a giant vat of what I assumed and still assume was wax, or paraffin, or whatever the figures were made of, heated with steam coils and gently simmering. There was a table the size of the *USS Lexington* with the tools of Mr. Berrigan's trade: knives and scrapers and spatulas and wires and glass eyes and wigs. But more important, more impressive, more absolutely, incredibly, sixth-grade *wonderful* were the works in progress. All over the room there rested heads, arms and legs, and torsos. A half-finished President Johnson head sat on a table; there was a headless and armless body that was dressed in cowboy clothes—Marshall Dillon, I presume? Or maybe Bat Master-son? Hideous monster faces stood on wire bodies or hung

from hooks on the wall, including one that would, some twenty years later, bear a striking resemblance to one E.T. I picked up a fully-formed, scaly arm from the table and growled, thrusting it at Pat; he responded by holding an alien's head up in front of his own and lunging at me. We laughed, but then quickly strangled the noise. We just wanted to look, and we certainly didn't want to get caught. We examined, explored, gaped, and exclaimed for about a half hour, until we heard a creaking that frightened us. We bolted up the stairs and back out into Boston Alley, congratulating ourselves on our feat of bravery and derring-do, the Commie spy having blithely made his way back to Moscow with the secret plan.

That Saturday we took Vince with us, and the three of us crept back down to the workroom. The cowboy turned out to be an astonishing likeness of Nick Adams, "The Rebel." Again, we stayed for a few minutes, touching but not removing anything, and skulked out.

We discovered that the door was never locked, at least not during the day, and Pat and I, or Vince and I, or Pat and Vince, or Pat and Vince and I, or sometimes just me alone, went down there to marvel and explore several times over the next few weeks. We weren't al-

lowed to see Mr. Berrigan's finished products, but we liked them even better seeing them as works in progress.

The mayor, in the meantime, was fit to be tied. He couldn't shut the Whacks Museum down on an obscenity charge, and he couldn't sue Mr. Berrigan for libel or slander since the wax figure in the window was a tribute to His Honor. Of course most of the town was laughing at him, which was obviously, but not *legally* Mr. Berrigan's intent. But Mayor Hubert came up with an idea and at the next council meeting he got up and introduced a measure to rezone Frémont Street so as to exclude shows and displays and businesses where merchandise is not purchased nor food consumed. The council, all his buddies and fellow cronies, of course passed the amendment unanimously, and Mr. Berrigan was informed the next day that he was in violation of the town zoning ordinance and had sixty days to vacate the premises of his wax figures. Of course, he could *sell* them; that would be within the spirit of the zoning change, but he couldn't charge anyone to just come in and *look* at them. He could've put price tags on them and *pretended* to sell them, but he still wouldn't be able to legally charge the admission fee.

Mr. Berrigan didn't have a



leg to stand on. The proposed amendment was posted in the legal ads in the *Courier*, as was proper, and all parties in opposition were invited to attend the council meeting. Mr. Berrigan, as mentioned, never attended the council meetings, which were all open to the public, and no one else—all parents and Bellerive residents and PTA members—saw fit to rise in his defense. As Vince put it, Mr. Berrigan had been screwed, blued, and tattooed. In two months, he had to be out.

Our parents all reluctantly gave us one last dollar and let us go in to see the exhibits one more time. We all—us kids, I mean—told Mr. Berrigan how sorry we were, but he didn't say anything, just shrugged and shook his head. We knew how he loved that museum and all the statues, but we also knew that he wouldn't want to cry in front of a bunch of kids.

About six weeks after the council vote, the American Legion chapter had its annual dinner-dance at the Legion Hall, an ex-Masonic temple that was also used for most of the weddings and bar mitzvahs in town. Over a thousand people attended; the AL dinner-dance was the social event of the Bellerive calendar, since a sprinkling of everyone—the Protestants and the Catholics, the Jews and the Negroes—all

came together under one roof for friendly and patriotic socializing.

I wasn't there, of course, but the *Courier* the next day had the story in such graphic detail that I might as well have been:

People started drifting out between twelve thirty and one A.M. Among them was Mayor Hubert, flushed with the congratulations of a cross-section of Bellerive society for his masterful handling of the Whacks Museum affair. The mayor was crossing the gravel road that separated the Hall from the grass parking lot when all of a sudden this big black car—a Cadillac, by all witnesses' descriptions—comes zooming down the road, spitting rocks in all directions, and catches the mayor right when he's in the middle of the road. The impact sent him flying fifty feet, and he was dead before he hit the ground. The car kept speeding, didn't slow down, just made jelly out of poor Mr. Hubert and kept going.

But what made the story even more interesting was that as the "death car" (so named in the *Courier*) passed in front of the Legion Hall, spotlights used to illuminate the night shone directly into the vehicle, and no fewer than seventeen witnesses gave the exact same description of the driver. He was a middle-aged man, balding with a pro-

nounced widow's peak, a good thirty or forty pounds overweight, with wireless glasses and a small mustache, like the one Gale Gordon on the *Our Miss Brooks* show wore. But what was more remarkable was that all the witnesses agreed that the driver had a look of fear or horror on his face, which he had *before* he hit the mayor, and which didn't change *after* he struck him. Speculation was that the guy's accelerator was stuck, he couldn't control the car or stop it, and after he accidentally hit Mr. Hubert, he panicked and just kept on going. The state police were asked to help in the investigation, but as of the afternoon paper there were no suspects and no leads. An artist's rendition of the driver appeared in newspapers all over the state, and even the network affiliate in Little Rock showed the picture. After all, Mr. Hubert was the mayor of a town.

Well! I can tell you that when Pat and I met the next day in Boston Alley, we had little else to talk about. We had small sympathy for the loss of the mayor, since he had cost us Berrigan's Whacks Museum, but still, a crime of such brazen audacity deserved punishment. We spent a long time coming up with appropriate torments for the perpetrator, influenced no doubt by but surpassing some

of the exhibits in the building we sat against.

Pat's father worked for a local moving company, and so he knew that on the following day a big truck had been reserved to start taking Mr. Berrigan's statues to their new home . . . a dead storage warehouse two hundred miles away. Having run out of ways to punish the mayor's killer, we decided to take one last, loving tour through Mr. Berrigan's basement.

Things hadn't changed much down there in the past few weeks. It was as if Mr. Berrigan had given up creating those magnificent works of his, and who could blame him? In fact, the last few times we'd been there we'd seen virtually *no* changes of any kind. It'd been like walking into a photograph. But this time, something struck me immediately, something that was on the large table, amid the lumps of wax and unfinished heads and knives. I walked over to it, and picked up one of those cheap cardboard "periscopes" with two little mirrors that were going at the five and ten for ninety-nine cents. You could use them to peer over fences and around buildings without being seen by the enemy, which came in handy while we were playing *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* But what would Mr. Berrigan be doing with one of them?

Pat had walked over to the other side of the room, where a draped figure stood. "I don't remember seeing this," he stage-whispered to me.

"Neither do I," I whispered back.

"I'm gonna see what it is," Pat said, and he pulled at the tarpaulin.

It was the figure of a middle-aged man, overweight, balding, with glasses and a Gale Gordon mustache. The hands were out, as if grasping a steering wheel. The face was frozen in a rictus of shock and fear. I think I gasped, but I know for a fact that Pat yelled and stepped backwards, tripping over his own feet and pulling the tarp completely off the figure. The statue tottered for a moment, then righted itself.

"Pat!" I hissed. "That looks like the guy who was driving the car that hit the mayor!"

Pat was still sitting on the floor. I could hear his heart pounding from across the basement. "Dummy can't drive no car, dummy!" he said.

I brandished the periscope. "No, but what if someone put the statue in the car to make it look like it was driving, and then sat on the floor and worked the gas and used this to see over the dashboard—" I paused to gulp a breath—"so he could see where to steer!"

"Are you saying—" Pat be-

gan, but then we both froze at the sound of rapid footsteps coming down the stairs.

"Who's there?" we heard Mr. Berrigan call. They were the first words we'd heard him say in weeks.

"Hide!" I breathed, and ducked behind some boxes and crates. I hoped Pat had found himself a place to hide too, but the blood rushing through my eyes had sort of made everything black.

I heard the sound of adult feet hitting the stone floor of the basement. "Who's there?" Mr. Berrigan asked. "Come out of there, I know you're here!"

I started to get up. After all, I was guilty only of trespass, not breaking and entering or burglary. Only later did it occur to me that Mr. Berrigan would have been better off with no witnesses to his culpability.

As I rose behind the cartons, I was facing the driving statue. Mr. Berrigan was between me and the statue, his back to me. I was about to say something when the wax figure with the horrified expression moved forward an inch. From somewhere behind it, a deep voice said, "Berrigan!"

He jumped, and so did I, but then I recognized the voice as the one Pat used when he was imitating his father. What was he up to?

"Berrigan!" the "statue" said again, and it moved forward

another inch. "What you did was wrong! Turn yourself in!"

I almost said, "Pat, are you crazy?" but the words died in my throat. If he had an idea, let him go ahead with it.

I could see the hairs on Mr. Berrigan's neck stand up, along with a few on his head. "Wh-wh—" he said.

The wax figure's hands began to move up and down. "You can't get away with this," Pat's father's voice said. "You can't live with this. Turn yourself in!"

The figure moved forward another inch, and began to sway gently. Mr. Berrigan was gulping, choking, trying to form words. Finally, he managed to spit out a sentence: "He—he took you all away from me! He took you!"

"We are just wax, Berrigan," the driver said. "We are nothing. You took a human life." The voice grew louder. "You've committed a grave sin, Berrigan! You made me help you! Go to the police, now! Turn yourself in!"

I'll be screwed, blued, and tattooed if Mr. Berrigan didn't fall to his knees right there on the floor and begin to beg the figure's forgiveness. I actually started to laugh, but he was

babbling so he didn't hear me. One of the statue's arms pointed toward the staircase.

"Go!" Pat's father said. "Now!"

I couldn't believe it as I saw it happening, but Mr. Berrigan got himself up and dragged himself up the stairs and out the door, apologizing and babbling all the way.

The tension and fear and I don't know what were released in me then, and I burst into uncontrollable laughter. By the time I stopped, Pat was standing near me, his eyes wide. He was shaking.

"Oh," I said to him, "that was great." I put a hand out. "Slap me five, jive," I said.

He didn't slap me anything. He said, in a small voice, "I didn't do nothin'."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "You scared Mr. Berrigan into going to confess."

Pat gave a little shake of his head. "I told you, I didn't do nothin'."

We both turned and looked at the wax figure. Then we both bolted up the stairs and out the door and down the alley in the best Three Stooges tradition.

Because, you see, when we'd both turned to look at the wax statue . . . it smiled at us.

# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



*Photo by Brian N. Cox*

Breaking away. We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

---

The winning entry for the July Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.



FICTION

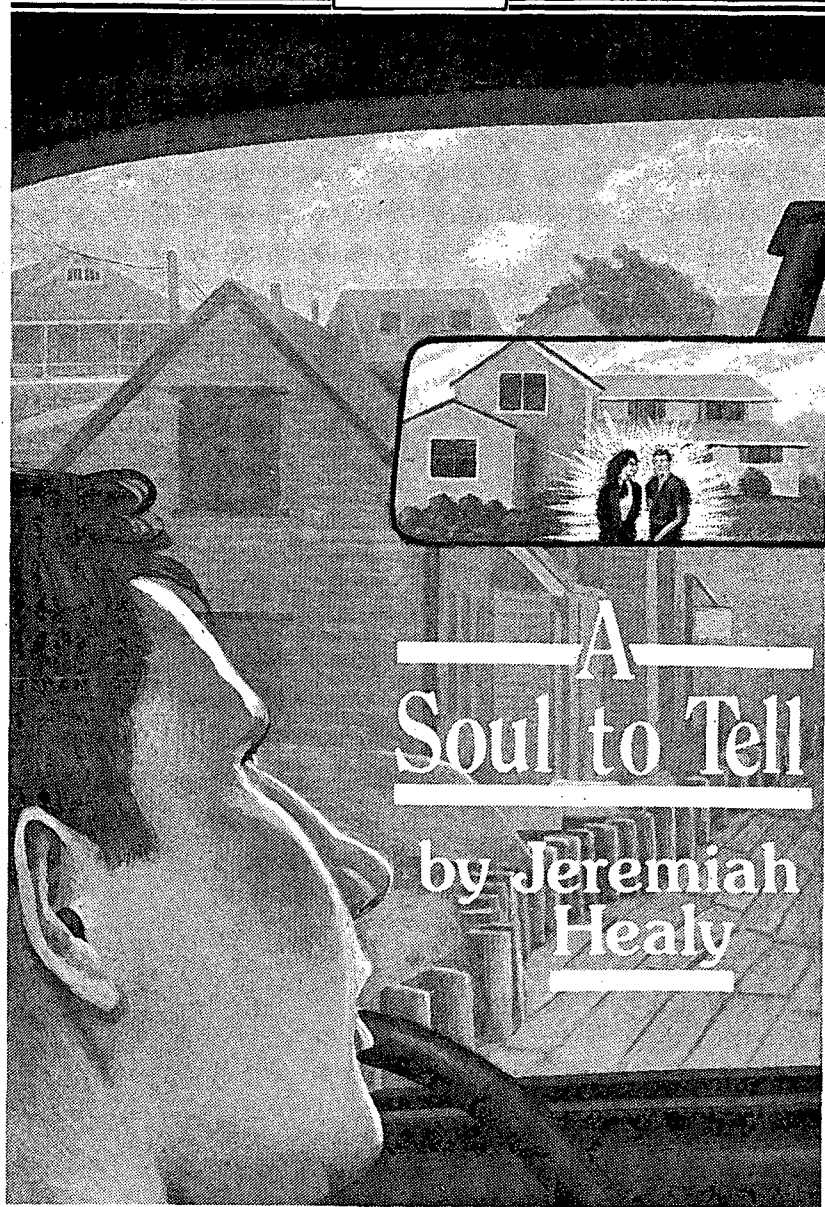


Illustration by Mark Fresh

74

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



---

---

“**M**ay I have your attention. The Delta Connection, Business Express Flight 3557, with direct service to Nantucket and continuing service to Martha's Vineyard, is now ready for passengers through Gate 15. All rows may now board the aircraft.”

I hefted my duffel bag and joined the line of folks handing little passes to the uniformed smile. An hour before, I'd locked “John Francis Cuddy, Confidential Investigations,” and hailed a Boston cab to Logan Airport. It's cheaper to drive to Cape Cod and take the ferry to Nantucket, but I was on expenses, and the client on the phone had said the sooner the better. She also said I wouldn't be needing a firearm or dress clothes, just a camera and lots of film.

We made our way down a flight of stairs and onto a jitney bus with deep leatherette seats. Gas tankers, Marriott food service trucks, and baggage shuttles made for heavy traffic on the macadam. The bus driver pulled up to our plane, a twin-prop Shorts 360 that looked a lot like our jitney with wings. I heaved my duffel into the open baggage hold near the tail. The maybe thirty of us filled most of the seats in the cabin, the takeoff reminding me of walk-

ing through a machine shop going full blast. When the pilot reached cruising altitude, the stewardess began pouring soft drinks.

The plastic cups were barely on the trays before we began our descent into Nantucket, the “Faraway Isle” of whalers. Gentle hills and moors, sporting a dozen shades of yellow, brown, and orange in the clear October air. My wife Beth and I used to talk about taking a getaway weekend to the island. Before the cancer took her.

On the ground, a guy wearing sonic earmuffs unloaded the baggage hold onto a cart and wheeled the cart to a glassless service window, through which he passed our luggage. Following the client's suggestion, I signed for a Jeep Cherokee at one of the rental counters and got a map and finger-traced directions to 76 Main Street, the bed and breakfast the client named.

There was only one architectural style on the drive from the airport, even the gas stations done in silver cedar-shake siding. The predominant trim color was white, a few nonconformists daring powder blue and even dull red. Once in town, however, there was a Federalist flavor to things, including a number of brick or clapboard mansions and cottages.

The inn turned out to be one of the white clapboard places, a friendly woman named Shirley registering me and asking what I wanted from my time on the island. When I said I wasn't sure, she rattled off ten or twelve spots I could visit, with brochures on what to look for when I arrived at each. After I was shown to my room and oriented on breakfast and next morning, Shirley wished me a good dinner and a good night.

Unpacking took only until four o'clock. Since the weather was clear and I didn't know what the client had in mind for my time, I decided to walk the town and harbor. Main Street angled downhill past quaint shops, spreading and petering out at wharves that held tiny shacks dolled up as art and crafts galleries. Not too many pleasure craft so late in the season, but still a lot of scallopers and charter boats.

At the sound of a hooting horn, people who had been lounging on benches or curbs suddenly gathered themselves and rushed toward a docking ferry. One couple doggy-walked a sea-kayak on its two-wheeled trailer, him at the bow, her at the stern, smiling tolerantly at the odd looks and snapshots being taken of them.

Leaving the harbor, I criss-crossed the streets, noticing the police station on South Water

only by the one black and white Ford patrol car parked in front of it. As the sun set, I joined the rest of the tourists in what seemed to be the major preoccupation: reading menus posted outside restaurants and shaking heads at the high prices listed. I eventually settled on a reasonable place called Obadiah's, an old fashioned basement dining room on India Street. The wide-board pine benches were lacquered, the clam chowder and swordfish magnificent. I added a bottle of sauvignon blanc to the bill.

Upstairs, the sidewalks were rolling up. I walked off dinner for twenty minutes or so, appreciating the charm of the town in the afterglow of the wine. Climbing back up Main, I nearly broke my ankle twice on the cobblestone street, the stones themselves rounded but hummocky above the old cement.

At the inn, an equally friendly man named Mitch welcomed me all over again. After a few minutes of small talk, I went up to my room. In the spirit of the island, I went to sleep with the windows open and the door to the corridor unlocked.

“I’d rather hoped to go deaf first, you see.” Eleanor Ware sat across from me, sipping herb tea from a delicate

china cup. The cup was the only delicate thing about her. High forehead, broad nose, strong jaw. A whisper of makeup around the eyes, and black hair generously streaked with gray. The hair was pulled back and caught in a ponytail, as though she did that just once each day and undid it just once at night. The kind of clothes you see in a Talbot's window, all earth colors. Fifty-plus, and not the least bit afraid to show it.

Ware received me on a wicker settee in the solarium of a traditional Cape Cod, a railed wood deck visible through the sliding glass doors behind her. She already had asked me if I'd enjoyed the inn, and I already had told her that breakfast on the patio there had been great except for the yellow jackets. Apparently, the beautiful weather brought them out, wasps being "a small price to pay for sunshine in October." I'd just managed to get us onto why she wanted to hire me, but I was having trouble understanding her.

"Let me get this straight, Mrs. Ware. You want me to follow your husband around?"

"Yes, yes, but not for some—what do you detectives call it, 'ulterior motive'?"

"Investigator."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm an investigator. Detectives are on police forces."

"Yes, yes. Tell me, Mr. Cuddy. Are you married?"

"Widower."

"Oh. Oh, I am sorry." Her eyes blurred as she set the cup in a matching saucer. "Forgive me, Mr. Cuddy. And please forgive me too my joke about going deaf. You see, my husband Mycah has been in real estate ever since he came to the island—his office is just off Main Street. He turns fifty-five next February, and he's always promised to retire then. Mycah certainly deserves it, the man has worked day and night for decades and has always been a fine provider. But, with the boom in housing the last few years, he's scarcely had any time to spend with me. And I'm afraid, frankly, that in maintaining and expanding my own circle of friends . . . I'm just afraid that Mycah and I have rather lost touch with one another, that we won't have much in common once he retires."

"So you want me to follow him around?"

"Yes. To see what he does, how he spends his day. Then report back to me so that I can learn more about his interests and at least have topics of conversation when we begin spending more time together in a few months."

I shifted in my wicker chair.

"Couldn't you just sort of ask him about that?"

Ware blushed. "Ask Mycah about what he does, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Oh, no. No, that would be . . . inappropriate. He'd feel that I didn't love him enough to have kept up with him."

I thought about Beth, all the time I spent away from her before knowing she was sick. Eleanor Ware's sentiment was a little corny, but I could understand it.

I said, "You want pictures of him?"

"Pictures?"

"Photographs. All the camera equipment I brought."

"Oh. Oh, I see. No, the island attracts a lot of naturalists, you see. When I suggested camera gear on the phone I meant for it to give you—do detect—sorry, investigators, call it 'cover'?"

"Close enough. I follow him around pretending to take pictures of the birds and the bushes."

"Precisely."

"You don't think he'll notice that."

"Mycah? No. No, everyone who visits Nantucket and rents a Jeep is sightseeing, and this is a small island with only so many roads. Even if he saw you more than once, he wouldn't give it a second thought."

"Do you want pictures of any of the people he meets?"

"No. Thank you, but no. My-

cah must spend a good deal of his time showing properties to prospective buyers from away. From off-island, that is. I wouldn't be needing to meet or talk to any of them. I just want you to trail after him for, oh, say, three days? Then report back to me. Would that be satisfactory?"

"Three days at four hundred a day added onto my time to get here and get back, plus expenses."

"I assure you that I can afford it."

I looked around at the elaborate furniture, adjoining a living room with a baby grand piano but without a television. People who don't have a TV in their living room usually can afford it.

"What I meant, Mrs. Ware, is that you might not be getting much value for your money."

"I'm a fair judge of value, Mr. Cuddy. And besides, even if this is just a whim, I'd like to know. It will help me be a better helpmate to Mycah during his transitions from active professional to retired husband."

"You have a recent picture of him?"

She frowned. "Can't you just—what, 'pick him up' outside the house here?"

I gestured toward the front door. "Your house sits on this little knoll with a meadow in

front of it. There's no place for me to conceal the Jeep, and even your husband would wonder about a car that picked him up right outside his driveway."

"Yes. Yes, I see your point."

"It would be a lot easier for me to latch onto him at his real estate office, and that way I could start this afternoon."

"Just a moment."

Ware rose and strode purposefully to the piano. She came back carrying a large photo, holding the frame at northwest and southeast corners like an auctioneer's assistant. "This is a portrait we had done at Bachrach's in Boston." The woman couldn't quite keep the pride from her voice. "I'm told they even had it displayed in their glass case on Boylston Street."

The photo showed Mrs. Ware sitting and a bold, assured man with auburn hair standing halfway behind her. His right hand rested on her shoulder, her left hand bent upward to touch his.

"You make a striking couple."

She blushed again and replaced the frame on the piano. Her sentimentality and strength made an attractive combination, and I found myself envying husband Mycah just a bit.

Resuming her seat, Eleanor Ware asked if there was anything else.

"What kind of car does your husband drive?"

"Cadillac."

"Model and color."

"Coupe de Ville, rather a burgundy. With all the dirt roads on the island, a Jeep would be more practical, but Mycah has always loved his Cadillacs."

"You know anyone on the local police force?"

My questions seemed to throw her. "The police?"

"Yes."

"What do they have to do with our arrangement?"

"Hopefully nothing. It's just standard procedure to check in with them when I start working in a new town."

"Is it . . . some kind of law or regulation?"

"No. Just good business practice."

"I see. Well, I have a problem with that."

"What is it?"

"On the telephone, when I called, you said that your licensing statute would keep everything between us confidential."

"That's right."

"Confidential even from the police?"

"I don't read the statute every week, but it just says I might have to reveal to a court, not the cops. Why?"

"Well, you see, I'm an islander. I was raised here, with

the chief of police, among others. I would . . . It would be embarrassing to me for them to know that I'd hired you to follow Mycah."

"That's understandable. Tell you what. I'll just let the police know I'm down here on business, not what the business is or who it's for. Would that be all right?"

Ware seemed to think about it. "Yes. Yes, that would be fine." She reached down next to her chair and brought up a handbag from which she coaxed a fat envelope. "I'd like to pay you a retainer in advance."

As she counted fifties from the envelope, I said, "A check would be fine."

Ware stopped counting for a minute, weighing the bills in her palm as though that would somehow be a quality control on her tally. "No. No, I got the cash for this, and frankly, it makes it better."

"Better?"

"This is a small island, Mr. Cuddy. It's hard to have secrets, even harder to share them. That's why I wanted someone from away—someone like you—to help me. Paying you in cash means no snoopy bank teller will know my personal business."

Eleanor Ware finished counting and handed me the bills, being careful, I thought, not to

let our fingers touch.

“K ate Hearn.”  
“John Cuddy, sergeant.”  
“Kate, please.”

I released her hand. She sat back down behind a cluttered desk, me taking one of the metal chairs in front of it. The biggish patrol officer who had brought me into her office closed the door as he left.

Hearn said, "Chief's on vacation, off-island."

Mrs. Ware would be pleased.

Hearn inclined her head toward the door. "Ben said you're a private investigator."

"Yes."

"From Boston?"

"My accent give me away?"

Hearn laughed, one sharp bray. "No, it's just there aren't so many from the Cape, and I thought I knew most of the operatives from New Bedford and Fall River."

Her hair on the sides and back touched the collar of her shirt. The bangs in front were just past her brow. Any longer and she'd have to blow out a breath to keep them off her eyes, which were blue and steady. "So, what brings you to Nantucket?"

"I'm going to be driving around a lot with a camera, and I thought I ought to check in with you first."



"Uh-huh." The steady eyes never left me. "You're going to be driving around a lot."

"Right."

"Make, model, and plate?"

I told her. She wrote them down.

"Where are you staying?"

"Seventy-six Main Street."

"Good choice."

"I'm comfortable."

Hearn waited me out, then said, "Am I going to get a real answer to my question about what brought you here?"

"Confidential."

"Confidential."

"Sorry."

Hearn puffed out a breath, flipping the bangs. "Okay. Consider yourself checked in, then. But don't expect any favors without doing some yourself."

When I got up, we shook hands anyway.

High noon, but not much happening in downtown Nantucket. Three elderly women were window shopping, pointing politely and nodding at everything each one said. A hard-faced guy in a blue jogging suit was loafing on the hood of his car, arms and ankles crossed. He looked like he'd made his money young. Some kids of college age were camped on a curb, knapsacks as backrests, eating ice cream.

I could see the doorway to

Ware Realty through the driver's side mirror. I studied a map of the island and fiddled with my camera like a tourist about to strike off for the afternoon. A burgundy Coupe de Ville occupied a parking space three down from mine. A tweedy middle-aged couple had gone into the realty office about fifteen minutes before, he seeming less enthusiastic than she did.

I was down to counting the number of ponds on my map when Mycah Ware came out holding a clipboard in his right hand. In tow were the middle-aged couple and a stunning redhead in a bottle-green dress that I would bet complemented her eyes. The quartet crossed to the Cadillac, the men taking the front seats, the women the rear, the redhead showing some leg as she climbed in. Even the guy in the jogging suit seemed to sit up straighter. Waiting until Ware passed me, I started up and after them.

I should have had ice cream with the knapsackers.

Ware took his customers to three houses, all indistinguishable to me under weathered shingles and white picket widow's walks. At each stop, Ware sashayed the woman in the couple all over the grounds, tapping and then holding a pen to the clipboard in his hands.

The redhead tagged behind with the man in the couple, seemingly doing the same things with her pen and clipboard. Then everybody went into the house for half an hour or so.

The only change in the routine was the part of the island we visited. First west to the Dionis Beach area, then south to Cisco Beach, then east past the airport toward Low Beach.

While Ware and the redhead hucked, and the couple absorbed, I took photos. Of everything. Kids windsurfing in striped wetsuits, a woman in a straw hat painting a seascape on an easel, tufted grasses at the base of dunes. Double-rung fences of gray split rails, country mailboxes with little red flags, kaleidoscopic fields of wildflowers. Estuaries with small sailboats, moors of pumpkin-hued heather. Small trees bent over from the prevailing wind, briar patches even Br'er Rabbit wouldn't call home. You name it, I shot it, my eyes blearing and my back creaking.

At house number three, a blue Thunderbird with classical music wafting from the radio pulled even with me. Bent over my umpteenth wildflower, I looked up at the driver. Preppy face, short blond hair, the kind of guy who wouldn't look quite thirty until he was well past forty.

He said, "You okay?"

"Fine, thanks."

"Saw your car on my way into town, then saw you still here. Thought you might be broken down."

"No. Just taking pictures. Thanks, though."

"Any time." He waved and accelerated slowly away.

I wondered if I had just met one of Kate Hearn's officers out of uniform.

The Thunderbird was barely out of sight when Ware and the others left the house and piled into the Caddy. We drove back toward town, stopping at a classy private clubhouse set a hundred feet from its driveway. I stole the spirits from some more flora, trying not to notice the rabbit squashed flat near the entrance or the ravens licking their chops on the power lines. An hour later, the Coupe de Ville pulled back onto the road and went the rest of the way into Nantucket. The fabulous foursome disappeared into the realty office for half an hour more, then reappeared with vigorous handshakes and polite kisses all around. The wife in the couple was clutching a big manila envelope and beaming ecstatically; the husband was missing a shirt pocket with his pen and wearing an expression like he'd just been in a train crash.

Once the couple was out of sight, Ware and the redhead smiled at each other and went to the Cadillac. Off we went, this time toward the east along Milestone Road. I checked a couple of times for the Thunderbird but didn't see it.

When we got to the village of Siasconset, Ware and the redhead started house-hopping again. They'd circle around a place, clipboards in hand, Ware apparently giving her some tips as he pointed at exterior features, then to a form on her clipboard. At each house they'd go inside for half an hour or so, then come back out. These times I shot a towering, red-banded lighthouse; gray, dumpy hens that looked wild; and larger silver-shake mansions with English hedges and gardens.

After the third house, we again returned to town, dusk and a little fog heavy on the moors along the road. A block from the realty office, Ware came to a stop. The redhead and he shook hands theatrically, a pronounced "We-did-it" pantomime, then laughed. She got out of the Caddy and into a Mercedes convertible, the only one I'd seen on the island so far. Ware waited until she started up before he put his car in gear.

I followed Ware back to his own house, continuing on as he slewed into his driveway and

put the Caddy in the garage via some kind of electronic door-opener. Figuring he was through for the night, I drove back to the inn, thinking over dinner that old Mycah had probably turned a tad more than four hundred for his day's work with the middle-aged couple.

**I** was getting better at keeping the yellow jackets out of my Wheat Chex.

On the patio in the backyard of 76 Main Street, I read the local newspaper and tossed sugar cubes to the sparrows. Past the overhanging branches, there wasn't a cloud in the sky, temperature at eight A.M. in the low sixties. Sweater weather. Mycah Ware might lead a boring life, but I could see why people would want to live their only one on Nantucket.

Reluctantly, I folded the paper and went around front to the Cherokee.

There were two sets of different elderly ladies window-shopping, three male knapsackers who spoke in German or Dutch to each other while they ate croissants and slurped coffee, and the same rough-faced guy in a different jogging outfit. The redhead's Mercedes was already on the street. I didn't see Ware's Cadillac, but I wasn't worried.

Just after nine, the redhead came out of the realty office. She was dressed in a conservative gray suit today, talking and nodding a lot to a short, squat, older woman who appeared to be calling the shots for a taller, younger woman from the same gene pool.

The threesome moved on foot toward my car, the jogging suit guy swiveling around, following the redhead with his eyes and sighing. I realized it might be a daily ritual for him, watching the best-looking woman on the island. As the redhead drew even with my car, she squeezed a smile at me into her nodding at everything the squat woman said. Up close, the redhead's face looked carefully maintained, and I bumped her age up toward forty. The squat woman's voice was raspy and commanding, and I decided I didn't envy the redhead her next few hours.

Hearing a car door slam, I looked back up the street. Mycah Ware, in rose slacks and a teal sweater, was crossing to his office. He went inside, staying maybe fifteen minutes before emerging, going to his Caddy, and taking off. I started up and followed him eastward to the Sankatay Head Golf Club, near the lighthouse from the day before. He pulled into the driveway. I stayed at the edge

of the road and got out. I walked until I could see Ware, at the trunk of his car, yanking out a bag of golf clubs and waving to a kid who hustled over to help him with it.

For the next six and a half hours, I counted four-wheel-drive vehicles (fifty-one, but some of them were doubles), species of birds (seven, with only the sparrows, seagulls, and starlings sure I.D.'s), and finally kinds of flowers (I quit at thirty). I even got cruel, snapping candid shots of overweight tourists on mopeds. They wore helmets at all the wrong angles and silently screamed through open mouths as they careened down the hill.

The Cadillac finally reappeared at the mouth of the driveway. On the way to town, Ware stopped for a couple of belts at the same private club, then continued home, putting his car to sleep again in the garage.

As I drove back to town, I thought it looked like a long thirty years in front of wife Eleanor.

It was just dark when I parked half a block from 76 Main Street. Before I could get out, a tall guy in a Mets baseball cap and sunglasses limped over to my driver's side with a map in his hands.

"I wonder if you can help me?"

My hand on the door handle, I said, "Sorry. I don't know the island too well."

The passenger's side door rocked open and the guy in the jogging suit got in, a Smith & Wesson Bodyguard revolver almost lost in his fist. "That's okay. We do."

The guy with the Mets cap lowered his shades. The preppy blond from the Thunderbird. I didn't like his smile much.

"Okay, now pull over against that log there."

We were in the parking area for Dionis Beach. There was a big house with two peaked gables and a couple of smaller ones on the bluff, but all looked closed up for the season.

Jogging Suit said, "Turn off the engine."

I did.

"Put the keys on the dashboard."

Same.

"Now play statue for a minute."

Jogging Suit stayed where he was while Preppy got out from behind me. Preppy pointed a little automatic at my face while Jogging Suit opened the passenger's side and came around. Both leveled on me from ten feet away and at different angles as I got out of the car. Very

professional and not a good sign.

"Assume the position on the hood."

I complied. They didn't bother with my wallet. Another bad sign.

Preppy said, "We're going to take a walk on the beach. You go first. Turn when we say. Don't do anything stupid."

I led them up the sandpath and over the cliff, sidwinding to the beach below.

Nobody around.

"Turn right and walk east, up the beach."

I started east, then clumping and squeaking in the sand behind me. It was a lot colder right along the water, the moonlight dancing off the waves. The beach stretched into the distance, but was only twenty yards wide before it abutted the cliff. Nowhere to run.

We'd scuffed about a quarter-mile along the bowed lines of flotsam when I asked, "Much farther?"

Jogging Suit's voice said, "Keep walking."

Before long, I heard the clattering of wheels on what must have been a boardwalked path. There was also a high-pitched but muted whine that took me a minute to place.

A man in a motorized wheelchair came onto the beach, the tires doing surprisingly well in

the sand. He wore a Kangol cap low over his eyes and a muffler over his throat and under a heavy corduroy Norfolk jacket. The muffler was the same dark color as his sweater. He had what looked like calfskin driving gloves on both hands, one cradling a liquor bottle.

The Kangol Cap didn't speak for a good minute after we were close to him, probably to give me a chance to talk my way out of whatever I'd gotten into. I kept my own counsel.

Finally he said, "You know me?"

"I can't even see you."

Somebody kicked me behind the right knee. Cramping, I went down.

"View any better from there, Cuddy?"

I looked up and under the cap. Handsome face, youngish but strained from the chair. Something familiar.

"I've seen your picture."

"The name's Branca. Victor Branca."

Branca. A rising wiseguy in the Boston-to-Providence axis. Then a skiing accident, a total accident, if you could believe the papers, and he'd left the slope paralyzed from the waist down. Six, seven years ago.

"Now you know my name, you know you answer my questions straight when I ask them."

I said, "How come you know my name?"

A kick to the right kidney. I sagged onto that side and choked back what was rising in my throat.

Branca said, "I ask, you answer. Got it?"

I tried nodding this time.

Seeming satisfied, Branca said, "You camp outside the real estate office there. We figure, maybe you're tailing my wife. So we check with the car rental at the airport and run you with some people we know up to Boston. Turns out you're a P.I. Also turns out you look to be on Mycah Ware, not my wife. How come?"

There wasn't any good way to say it. "Sorry. Confidential."

A shot to the other kidney. Felt like a different kind of shoe.

"These guys, they can do this kind of thing till you're just jelly inside. How come you're tailing Ware?"

I shook my head and took a pointed toe just under the left shoulder blade that had me twisting in the sand next to a pink tampon applicator.

Branca said, "This Ware, he's clean. We checked him out quiet but good before I let my wife go to work for him. He don't juggle the books there, he don't even have a partner he could be shorting on the take. So, how come you're on him?"

I didn't bother to shake my head this time. One of the boys



grabbed me by the hair and pulled me up to my knees.

Branca motioned toward the sea. "You know, even when it's this cold, them crabs out there like to eat." He wagged a finger at me. "Why're you tailing Ware?"

"No."

Somebody remembered they hadn't whacked me behind the left knee and let fly there.

Branca said, "Only one possibility. His own wife put a tail on him. Only one reason for that, too. She thinks he's stepping out on her."

Through clenched teeth, I said, "No."

"Stepping out with my wife."

I got past the cramp. "That's not it."

"It's not?"

"No. His wife just wanted me to find out what he does."

"Why?"

I tried Mrs. Ware's retirement theory on him. It sounded lame even to me, and Branca didn't buy it. Then nobody said anything for a while.

Branca's voice came back, but different in tone. "When I had my accident, that was one thing that didn't get broken, you know? I thought Cynthia was still happy with me. I wanted to live as far away from a mountain as I could get, and this place suited me just fine. But without her, it wouldn't be so good."

If Branca were trying to sound wistful, he needed a little more practice.

"The people up to Boston there told me you were a stand-up guy, Cuddy. I ain't seen nothing different." Branca tapped the liquor bottle. "Boys?"

I got a whiff of the chloroform before one of them clamped the rag over my mouth and nose, but there wasn't much I could have done about it.

**"H**ey, Cuddy? Wake up. Come on. Up, up."

A strong arm was tugging on my left side. If I could have gotten to my feet, the smell of scotch would have knocked me back down. I wanted to crawl away from the man's voice with the scotch. I cracked my eyes open. The sunlight hurt, but I realized that the man was in uniform, the officer named Ben from the town police. And I was the one who stank of scotch.

Ben helped me up, snatching the empty Johnny Walker Black bottle from next to where I'd been in the sand. Ben waved to someone on the cliff who waved back. The lady in the straw hat at her easel.

I said, "What time is it?"

"Eleven fifteen."

My head was pounding as Ben made me start to shuffle up

the beach.

Kate Hearn blew at her bangs and said, "So you drive out to Dionis Beach last night, tie one on, and sleep it off at the tideline."

"Like I said. I don't remember much."

"You look like you hit the ground without a parachute."

"I haven't slept on the beach for a while. Cold sand takes it out of you."

"So does a liter of scotch. You want more water?"

"Please."

I was handed another paper cup.

"This has been an exciting morning for us, John Cuddy."

"Wish I could say the same."

"Lost one of our stellar citizens to a terrible accident."

Finishing the water just kept me from gagging. "Sorry to hear it."

"Yeah. Mycah Ware, real estate broker. Know him?"

"We never met."

"His office is just a little ways from where you're staying. Or where you had been staying before you decided to bed down on the beach instead. Ben here couldn't find you at 76 Main. Shirley and Mitch were some worried about you. One of the patrol cars spotted your Jeep at Dionis and rouined it in to us. That was when we went out looking for you."

"I appreciate it."

"Back to this Ware? Terrible situation. Fell down a flight of stairs this morning at a house he was sizing. Witness, one Cynthia Branca, saw him take the tumble. Frightened her near to death. Broke his neck, he did."

"Tragedy."

"Yeah, sure is. But since the witness is wife to somebody who's no stranger to violence, and since you checked in with me just two days before the accident, I thought you might have something to tell us."

I crumpled the cup. "I don't."

"Nothing at all?"

"Sorry."

"I'm sorry, too. I really am."

Hearn turned away and said, "You're free to go, Cuddy. But not to come back."

At the inn, I thanked Shirley for her concern. Cleaned up and changed, I packed my duffel bag, got into the Cherokee, and started out.

There were two other cars in the driveway of the Ware house, so I edged the Jeep into the bushes on the shoulder of the road and walked up to the front door. A solemn woman of about fifty ushered me inside. There were three other similar women looking sympathetic in the living room and two older men looking useless and restless. Eleanor Ware was sitting on

the couch, the centerpiece of the tableau.

She rose when she saw me, a handkerchief to her nose and mouth. "Thank you for coming."

"I know this is a difficult time for you, Mrs. Ware, but could I see you for just a few minutes?"

"Certainly." Turning to the others, she engaged each in eye contact. "We'll be on the deck. Please help yourselves to the refrigerator, and thank you again for coming."

Once outside, she slid the glass door shut in its track and joined me at the railing overlooking the moor below the knoll.

I said, "I have something you need to know about your husband's death."

"Go on."

I told her about Branca and the boys, that I thought they killed her husband in front of Cynthia to whipsaw her back into line.

Eleanor Ware let me finish before arching an eyebrow and allowing a twinkle into her eye. "Clever, killing two birds with one stone like that."

I was afraid she was losing her grip.

"Mrs. Ware, I don't think you understand. Branca thought—"

"That I believed my husband was having it on with his wife

when they 'inspected' those houses. I may have been—is the word 'adulterated,' Mr. Cuddy?—but I'm not stupid. That's exactly what Mycah was doing."

I had to hold onto the railing. "He was seeing Cynthia Branca, and you knew it?"

"Of course. Oh, Mycah was *ever* so discreet. No lipstick on the collar. I assume he stripped before he even touched her each time. But he'd grown so . . . inattentive. A wife really can sense these things."

"Then why did you have me follow him?"

"Now why do you think?"

"Jesus Christ."

A wry smile. "You see, Mr. Cuddy, Mycah wasn't just unfaithful. He wasn't even just inattentive. He was boring. God, I can't begin to tell you how unbearable it is to be on an island you love with a man who bores you to tears. I dreaded his retirement. A few hours a day with Mycah was one thing. But the rest of my waking hours for the rest of my life? Inconceivable."

"You set him up."

"I did not. And neither did you. In any way. I'm sure Mr. Branca's reputation is known to you. I know it wasn't to Mycah, or frankly even to me until I did some rather thorough research. But that research convinced me that Mr. Branca

would deal with Mycah because of what Mycah had done to him, not because of what Mycah had done to me. And you and I had virtually no role in that."

"Wait a minute. You flew me down here just to get Branca's attention?"

Ware looked at me. "I researched you, too, Mr. Cuddy. You'd lost your wife young. I thought you'd find my desire to be closer to Mycah in his retirement . . . admirable. I felt it would work. And it did."

"Why not just tell him yourself?"

"Tell Branca? Speak to a mobster and inform on Mycah? Just what sort of woman do you think I am, Mr. Cuddy?"

"The sort who'd pull the switch on her own husband rather than just divorce him."

"Divorce would have been too . . . public. Besides, Mycah made his own bier and shortly

will lie on it. I am sorry that you were—is it 'roughed up'?"

"Yeah. I still don't see why you needed me, though. You didn't want to talk to Branca, fine. Send him a note, an anonymous tip."

She looked out over the moor, the breeze ruffling the heather in a wave pattern like an ocean of iced tea. "No. No, you don't see it at all. It's as I said to you when we first met. This is a small island, and therefore secrets are very dear. If I'd done everything myself, I wouldn't dare share it with anyone here." She gestured back at the living room. "With anyone in there."

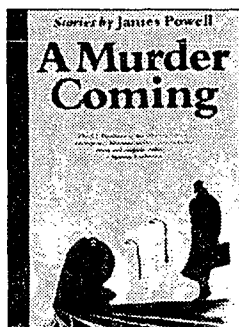
Mrs. Ware turned to me. "I needed someone bound by confidentiality, but I could hardly hire a lawyer to follow Mycah about. You see, Mr. Cuddy, I needed *you*. Otherwise, I wouldn't have had a soul to tell."

Winner of the Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine Reader's Award

# A Murder Coming

Introducing an exciting new book from

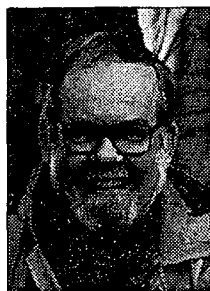
**JAMES POWELL**



The collection you've been waiting for! Fourteen frighteningly good stories from one of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine's* best-loved writers. Send for your copy of James Powell's *A Murder Coming* today!

*Powell's light-hearted but deeply satirical novelettes are not quite like anything else being written today in the mystery field or out of it.* – Ellery Queen

*Even while I'm chuckling, I can't help but notice that James Powell's stories have some of the cleverest plots around.* – Edward D. Hoch, Edgar Award-winning writer



**James Powell,**  
author of *A Murder Coming*

**6" x 9", 192 pages, \$14.95 paperback**

Yes! Send me \_\_\_\_\_ copies  
of James Powell's *A Murder  
Coming* at \$14.95, plus \$3 for  
shipping and handling. Money  
order or cheque accepted.

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for  
delivery. Price is US dollars.  
Your money back if you're not  
satisfied, as long as the book  
is still in saleable condition.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail to:** Yonge & Bloor Publishing, Dept. 100,  
696 Yonge Street, Suite 606, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4Y 2A7  
**Phone orders:** 416-922-1885

# UNSOLVED

by Guy Savant

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?*

*The answer will appear in the Mid-December issue.*

Four convicts—Flip, the smuggler, among them—recently escaped from a maximum security prison, tunneling out from their respective cells and making their way out of the country. Each used a different ingenious digging tool, including a bent nail file, to facilitate his escape. From the maze at the right and the clues below, can you figure out which cell each prisoner escaped from, the country to which each fled, the tool each used to tunnel from his cell, and each convict's crime and sentence?

1. The kidnapper was not sentenced to fifteen years.
2. The bank robber was sentenced to less time than the convict who used a pickax to escape; the convict who used a spoon was serving forty years, fifteen more years than the criminal who escaped to Mexico.
3. While in prison, Fred had the embezzler on one side of him and the convict who escaped to Argentina on the other.
4. Floyd was not convicted of kidnapping. He was, however, sentenced to a longer term than Forrest, who was to serve more time than the convict who used a shovel to escape to Switzerland.
5. The convict in Cell B was sentenced to life.

---

*See page 109 for the solution to the November puzzle.*



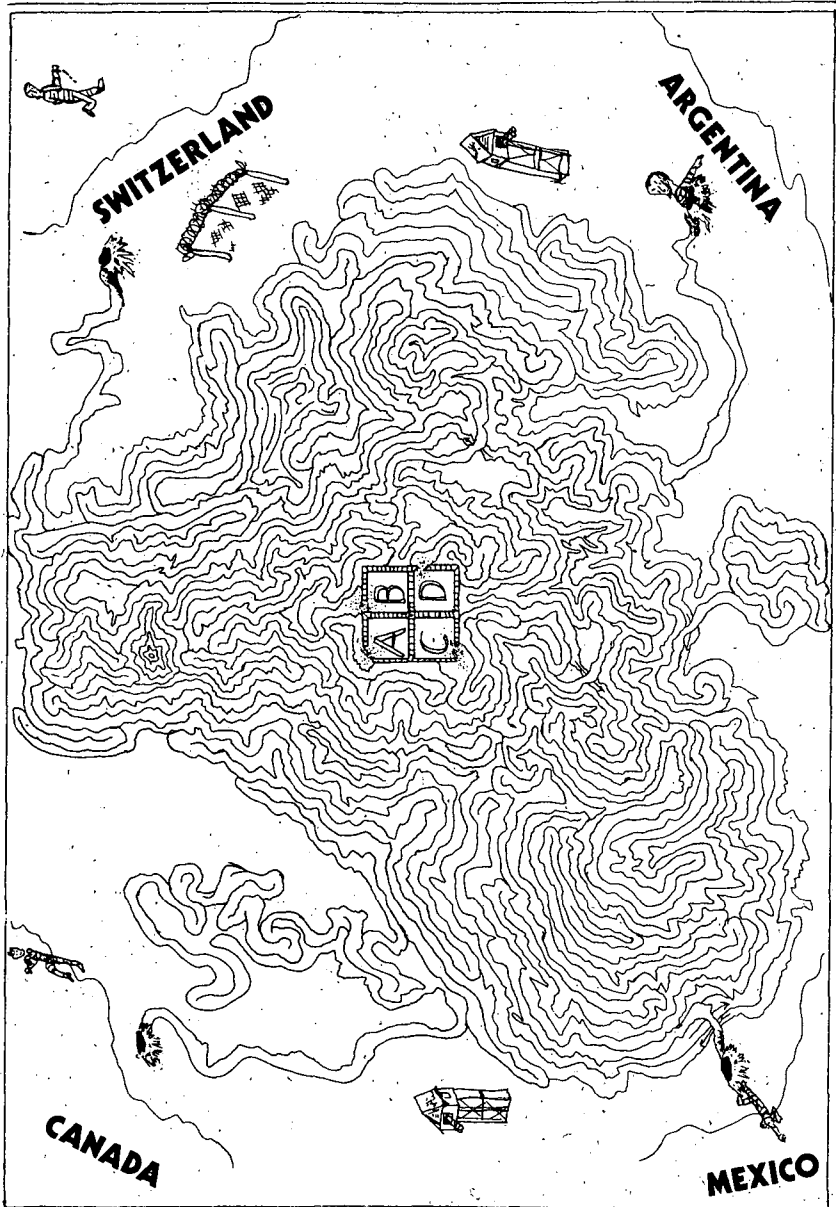
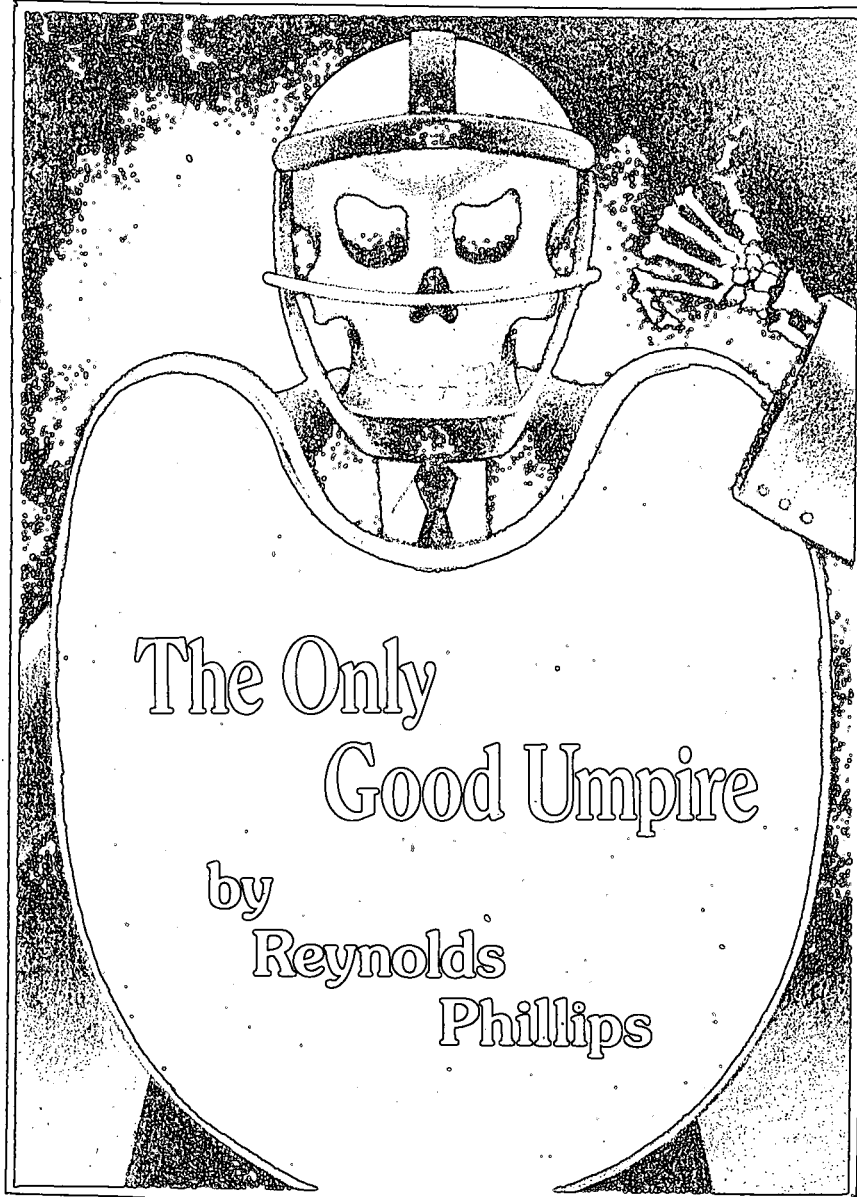


Illustration by John Williams

FICTION



# The Only Good Umpire

by  
Reynolds  
Phillips

**G**olden Age Tower, home to more than a hundred fifty senior citizens, was a twelve-story fortress surrounded by an urban jungle. Out there were drugs, muggings, and assorted mayhem. Inside, all was serene. And Stella Burgess did her best to keep it that way.

Today, on her twice-weekly turn at the reception desk, Stella sat inside the glass-enclosed cage that occupied one wall of the Tower's small lobby. She sat erect and alert, like a guard on duty. The way she thought of it, that's what she was—guarding the entrance to the retirement community, making sure no stranger entered unchallenged.

As always when on duty, she was wearing her short blonde wig, the color her hair used to be half a century ago when she was generally considered the best catch among the high school teachers of Camelot, Oregon. Before she grew old and her hair turned thin and gray and scraggly.

She saw the two teenage boys before the sliding glass door opened automatically and admitted them to the lobby. One of them she knew by sight, and by first name. Joaquin Somebody.

Well, she thought, at least they've learned to come in the

front entrance. In the past she had lectured Joaquin on sneaking in the delivery entrance in the rear, which you could do without being seen by the person at the reception desk. She had lectured Golden Age management on this chink in the Tower's security armor, too, but thus far to no avail.

Joaquin and his friend started to walk past the glassed-in cubicle.

"Where do you think you're going?" Stella demanded. Once her voice had been pleasantly throaty, but now it was coarse and harsh and she hated it.

Joaquin grinned at her, dazzling white teeth in a Latin-brown face. "Hey, man. We just—"

"I," Stella interrupted, "have lived eighty-one years, and not one of them as a man."

"Well, I jus' takin' my frien' Pablo up to see Joey Mazer's bizebull mementoes."

"*Mementoes*," said Stella. "Did Joey—*Joseph*—invite you?" It was disgusting when a man in his seventies wanted to be called Joey, as though he were still in grade school. And even worse when he filled his apartment with all that baseball junk.

"Joey say come any time. He say that when he umpire our game yesterday."

"Well, you just wait." She dialed Joey's number. His

apartment was down the hall from hers, and from his spinster sister Gertrude's, on the eleventh floor.

"Joey's dugout," he answered. "Joey speakin'."

Stella sighed, shaking her head. She quickly ascertained that Joaquin and friend did indeed have Joey's permission to come up and let him show off his baseball hall of fame.

She watched to make sure they went directly to the elevator. Not that she was prejudiced against Hispanics, or any minority for that matter. But after all, they weren't in school and they weren't working, like too many kids of all colors these days. Nothing better to do than waste their time playing ball on the public playground behind the Golden Age parking lot, and even going through the Tower's garbage before it was hauled off to the dump. At their age, she'd been drawing A's in high school and working evenings at the drygoods store.

In exactly fifteen minutes the boys emerged from the elevator, accompanied by Joey himself. Except for his face, thin and wrinkled and dominated by an aquiline nose, Joey looked as though he had stopped growing at the age of ten (where he probably *had* stopped emotionally, Stella thought). As he was fond of telling anyone who'd lis-

ten, his diminutive stature had prevented him from playing the game he loved and thus had driven him to attain considerable stature of a different sort—as a topnotch baseball writer for several big-city newspapers.

When they walked past the desk, Joaquin grinned at Stella. "All that bizebull stuff up there—damn worth a lot. Specially the Beb Root bat."

"*Babe Ruth*," said Stella. She fixed her gaze on Joey, who was wearing his New York Yankees cap today, on backwards as usual. "Don't wander too far away, Joseph. You know it's not safe out there."

"Just going to do some umpirin' for the boys," he assured her. Then, to his companions: "I remember Billy Martin said to me once, 'Joey,' he said, 'the only good umpire is a dead umpire.'"

As they went out the door, she heard Pablo say, "So mebbe you don't want do *too* good today, huh, Joey?"

Precisely at noon, Stella was replaced on the desk by Harriet Cutcliffe. Back in her cozy eleventh-floor apartment, she went directly to the big window overlooking the parking lot and beyond it the playground with its baseball diamond. There was a ball game going on down there

all right. She spotted Joey instantly, crouched behind the catcher, wearing that outlandish red and blue Hawaiian shirt with the green buttons.

As she watched, Joey thrust his right hand into the air. The batter, his bat still on his shoulder, swung around and waved a fist in Joey's face. And over on the batter's side of the field, his teammates were shaking their fists and yelling. Probably screaming, thought Stella, "Kill the umpire!" In Spanish.

It was evidently the third out, for the teams began changing places. Stella shrugged and crossed her living room to the tiny kitchenette. Two white plastic bags filled with the week's trash and kitchen garbage leaned against the pantry door. She picked them up and carried them out of her apartment and down the hall to the little trash disposal room.

Pushing open the door to the five by five cubicle, she reached in and switched on the light, still thinking about an old man who lived in his past and ignored his present. Well, she reminded herself, Joey hadn't been entirely ignoring it lately. Not since that little flapper, Minerva Helgeson, had arrived on the scene.

As she lifted the two foot square metal door that provided access to the garbage

chute, she became aware of the voices. There were two of them. Both female. Both raised to a level several decibels above normal conversation. No normal conversation would have penetrated the wall separating the trash room from Joey Mazer's apartment.

Her garbage bag bumped and thumped along its eleven story free fall, landing with a *whomp* in the Dumpster to which all Golden Age garbage was consigned. The racket prevented her from trying to translate the voice sounds into words. Not that it mattered really, because she intended to learn the nature of that loud discourse anyway.

Seconds after leaving the trash room, she thrust her finger at the doorbell outside Joey's apartment. It seemed forever before the door opened, framing the face of Joey's sister Gertrude.

Gertrude's fleshy cheeks were even redder than normal, indicating that her blood pressure was riding high at the moment. Stella had always found it difficult to believe that Gertrude and Joey were really siblings, for Gertrude was, well, *enormous*—burly enough to pick up her brother and hoist him over her shoulder like a sack of Idaho potatoes.

"Well," said Gertrude, strug-

gling to arrange her features into a welcoming smile. "What a nice surprise. But if you're looking for Joey, which I assume you are, he isn't in just now."

"Of course he isn't. That's why I stopped by, Gertrude. When you weren't at your unit, I came on over here." Stella was a strictly honorable individual, but then a little white lie now and again never hurt anyone. "I thought maybe I'd find you here, doing Joey's morning dishes or something."

"What do you mean—that's why you stopped by?"

"Well, I thought perhaps you would want to know what Joey is getting himself involved in lately. Just take a look out your window. Here, let me show you." With that, Stella stepped uninvited through the doorway, though she had to turn sideways to get past Gertrude in the little entry hall.

In the middle of the living room stood Golden Age's Minerva Helgeson. Stella could still remember the flappers of the 1920's with their close-bobbed hair, dancing the Charleston in their short, tight skirts. That's what came to mind whenever she saw Minerva. Minerva's bobbed hair was jet black (dyed, of course). And Minerva was still rather cute, with large come-hither

brown eyes, though Stella consoled herself with the knowledge that Minerva was a good ten years her junior. Minerva was also quite small, almost petite, just the right size for Joey Mazer.

Right now Minerva was smiling, though her eyes didn't seem to be participating. "Joey's down there umpiring a ball game, if that's what's bothering you," she said.

"Perhaps," responded Stella, "you haven't been here long enough to appreciate how hazardous it can be out there. Why, only last week poor Mrs. Crandall had her purse snatched while she was waiting for a bus right down at the corner."

She turned to Gertrude, who was now standing in the living room door, essentially filling it. "Gertrude, I wasn't sure you realized how much time Joseph's been spending down there with those street kids, and I know how protective you are of your brother."

"He needs protecting. He's really just a little boy himself in some respects." Gertrude waved a pudgy hand in a semicircle, finger pointed at the walls.

Stella let her eyes follow the pointing finger. The walls of Joey's living room were nearly covered with—Joaquin's words stuck in her mind—*bizebull*



*momentoes*. She knew some of them by heart. Most plentiful were the framed photos: Lou Gehrig with an arm around a young Joey's shoulders. Bob Feller following through on a pitch. Mickey Mantle. The late Billy Martin shaking a fist under Joey's nose—playfully, not menacingly as that batter had done a few minutes ago. And a dozen more baseball figures, most of whose names Stella had forgotten despite the fact that Joey had led her around the room on several occasions, introducing her to each hero, reading aloud the autographed *Dear Joey* messages penned on each.

Her gaze came to rest on the *pièce de résistance*: a genuine Louisville Slugger bat with a genuine, dark-ink signature of Babe Ruth scrawled on its shank. It lay horizontally against the wall, suspended by two golden cords. Below it sat, incongruously, a walnut swivel chair with a brass plate on its back. Engraved on the plate, she recalled, were words that went something like: "This was Billy Martin's personal chair. It sat in his office during his second tenure as manager of the New York Yankees."

Life after baseball for Joey, thought Stella, amounted to little but more baseball.

"Oh, I know," said Gertrude,

as though she were reading Stella's thoughts. "But you have to understand, Stella—baseball was Joey's whole life. And he was respected as a baseball writer, by the players as well as the fans. This—" she waved an arm at the walls again "—is all he has left."

"Not quite all," Minerva said softly. "Now he has me."

Rarely was Stella taken aback; usually she was well out ahead of the game. But this time she was reduced to staring, wide-eyed. First at Minerva. Then at the tight, phony smile on Gertrude's ample countenance.

"Yes," said Gertrude. "Joey gave me the fascinating news yesterday morning, Stella. He has asked Minerva to marry him—and she has accepted."

Stella opened her mouth, but no words emerged. Then she sat down, abruptly, in Billy Martin's old swivel chair. So abruptly that the casters rolled and the chair slammed into the wall beneath Babe Ruth's bat.

"Well, oh my . . . how nice," she said at last, aware that the remark was totally inane, and aware also that she had, without really trying, achieved that which had brought her to Joey's apartment: She now knew the subject of the discussion that had penetrated the trash room wall.

"Thank you," said Minerva, patting her bobbed hair. "And Gertrude has been so sweet about the whole thing."

I'll bet, thought Stella. She wondered if she should walk out right now and let them get at one another's throats again.

She said, "I suppose you'll be moving in here—after you're married, of course?"

"Oh, yes. After we're married, of course."

"Will you redecorate?" Stella looked around the photo-be-decked walls, considering what she should do with them if she were in Minerva's shoes, heaven forbid.

"Well," said Minerva, smiling a conspiratorial smile, "I *do* have a preference for Renaissance prints. But of course Joey and I haven't discussed it yet."

"When you do, it should make for an interesting discussion," said Stella. She recalled the time that Harriet Cutcliffe had sought to persuade Joey that he really should not wear his baseball cap at the Friday night bingo sessions. Joey had thrown a tantrum that did not quit until Gertrude hauled him screaming from the room. For a little man, Joey had a temper of homerun caliber.

"Well, Stella, it was nice of you to stop by," Minerva said suddenly, making it clear that Stella was dismissed and sounding as though she had al-

ready taken over Joey's apartment.

Stella departed, pausing outside the closed door just long enough to hear the voices behind it raised to their earlier confrontational level. It would be interesting to get both sides of this great debate. Tomorrow she would have to get together with both girls again—one at a time, of course.

The get-togethers took place next morning, but not quite in the manner Stella had anticipated. As she walked down the hallway en route to Gertrude's apartment, she found the door to Joey's unit standing open. A male voice, not Joey's, emerged from within. There was, of course, nothing for Stella to do but enter.

In the living room she found Gertrude sitting on the sofa, elbows on her knees and head in her hands, looking distraught. Across from her, seated in the Billy Martin chair, was a rather rough-hewn middle-aged man in a rumpled suit.

"As I was saying," he was saying, "we will make inquiries throughout the neighborhood, of course. But sometimes these old people—beggin' your pardon, ma'am—just climb on a bus and we find them next day wandering around clear across town. So I don't see no reason to be too alarmed yet."

"You don't see *any* reason,"

said Stella, before either of the others realized she was standing there in the living room doorway.

The man turned and looked up at her.

"No, not hardly none at all," he said, missing completely the gratuitous grammar lesson he had just received.

"Oh, Stella," moaned Gertrude, voice and chins trembling. "Joey's disappeared! Nobody's seen him since he was down there on the playfield yesterday afternoon. And look . . ." She waved her hand around the room.

Stella was already looking. The walls were bare, except for nails protruding where yesterday had been pictures of ball-players. The gold cords that had held Babe Ruth's bat now dangled empty against the wall. The only baseball treasure remaining was the chair in which the late Billy Martin had once sat and which the visitor now occupied.

The visitor arose. "I'm Detective Monahan from North City Precinct. And you're . . . ?"

She told him who she was, and that Joey might be a bit juvenile in his interests but he certainly was not senile enough to go wandering off on his own and, besides, everyone knew that it wasn't safe in this neighborhood with all those muggers and purse snatchers and drug

peddlers out there. And if the police were wise, they would begin by locating Joaquin Somebody and Pablo Somebody, who had shown such an interest in Joey's now-missing collection of memorabilia.

Detective Monahan nodded gravely as she spoke. Then, with repeated assurances of police follow-through, he departed. Stella debated whether to go over and put an arm around Gertrude and try to comfort her, but she had never really known the woman that well. She compromised by sitting in the chair just vacated and making suitable clucking noises.

As it turned out, now that the policeman was gone, Gertrude no longer appeared in need of comforting. Her voice was strong as she said, "Stella, do you think Joey could have taken his baseball stuff himself? Bundled it up and carted it off to some storage place?"

"Why would he do that?"

"Well, if he's decided to run away to avoid facing Minerva and telling her he's not going to marry her after all . . ." There was an openly hopeful note in Gertrude's voice. "I mean, I don't know that he's decided to drop that gold digger, but—"

"Gold digger? You mean you think Minerva is after Joseph's money? He never struck me as

the moneyed type." Stella fixed Gertrude with the stare she usually reserved for strangers entering the Golden Age lobby. "Of course you'd know about his assets, though. After all, he was—*is*—your own flesh and blood."

"Not really, my dear. Not really flesh and blood, I mean." Gertrude looked at the floor. "I may as well tell you: Joey's actually only my stepbrother. My father married Joey's mother when we were both little kids. Of course, we were raised like brother and sister."

"Well, that's a surprise. But it does explain how he can be so small and have a sister so—" She caught herself just in time to avoid the word *huge*. "Neither of you ever married, I suppose?"

Gertrude shook her head. "I've just kind of looked after Joey most of his life."

"Well, I can understand why you don't want some woman to get him this late in life." Get him, Stella thought, and get his *money*—whatever it amounted to.

From Joey's Stella descended to Minerva's fifth-floor apartment. Minerva answered the door in one of her endless array of contemporary-style dresses (much too young for her), but sadness looked out of her big brown eyes.

"Oh," she said softly. "You know."

Stella nodded. "I just stopped by to see if there is anything I can do. May I come in?"

"Please do."

The living room window was open, letting in a fresh spring breeze and the shouts of young baseball players already cavorting around the playfield diamond. Traffic sounds drifted up from Brighton Avenue, and a sudden loud slamming and grinding noise told her the garbage truck was making its thrice-weekly visit to the Dumpster, reminding her that she had forgotten to dump the sackload of old magazines she had painfully decided to get rid of.

"The police detective was just here," said Minerva. "He seems to think Joey just wandered away, or maybe panicked after realizing he'd promised to marry me."

"I suppose there could be something to that hypothesis," said Stella. "He may have come to realize that you're, well, rather a high-quality person compared to, well . . ."

"Oh, come now." The big brown eyes scolded her. "Besides, the pickings are pretty slim for all of us widows. You must be aware of that—you're a widow, aren't you?"

"Oh, yes. I lost my Walter eight years ago, God rest his

departed soul." Stella paused, switched conversational gears. "I have to think Joseph's disappearance had something to do with the fact that his baseball things were apparently stolen."

Minerva nodded. "I agree. But to think that anyone could consider them valuable enough to . . ."

"Exactly." So Minerva was thinking, too, that there might have been foul play. But before Stella could pursue this line of thought, Minerva gave her a sad smile and patted her shoulder.

"I do appreciate your stopping, and please feel free anytime," said Minerva, dismissing her for the second time in as many days.

She took the elevator to ground level and, bypassing the lobby, walked past the kitchen and out the delivery door in the rear. Sharply aware that she was violating her own safety code, she crossed the parking lot, opened the back gate, and stepped onto the playfield near the third-base line.

There was a batter at the plate. Two boys stood nearby, swinging bats as they awaited their turns. Stella immediately recognized one of them as Joaquin.

As she approached him, she was astonished to see that she also recognized the bat.

How utterly brazen, she thought.

"Let me see that bat!" she demanded.

Joaquin stared at her, mouth open without showing the white teeth. Wordlessly, he handed her the bat. She held it close to her bifocals, just to be sure. The authentic, handwritten signature of Babe Ruth stared back at her.

"I'll just take it," she said.

"No," he said, reaching. "Geeve eet back. Eet's mine."

"It's Joseph's. You stole it—after you did heaven knows what to—"

"I foun' it!"

"On Joseph's wall."

The game had stopped. The other boys were beginning to gather around, drawn by an impending drama potentially more interesting than a pickup game of ball. Stella swept them with a withering look and turned to walk away, clutching the bat firmly with both hands.

"Wait!" Joaquin grabbed her arm. "I foun' it, I tell you—right over there!" He pointed toward the Golden Age Tower, toward the high wooden door facing the parking lot, the door behind which the just-emptied Dumpster sat hidden from sight. "Joey throw it in the garbage—he mus' not want it no more."

"Like he doesn't want his right arm no more," said Stella, committing the unpardonable

sin of a double negative before she realized it. But give him this, she thought: He was a quick thinker. These neighborhood kids did prowl the Dumpster rather often, and sometimes they found things they could sell or hock or—she shuddered at the thought—even eat.

“Lady, gimme my bat!”

She turned and faced him. “I am taking this bat to the police. One more word out of you, young man, and I’ll be forced to make a citizen’s arrest!”

Joaquin may not have known a citizen’s arrest from any other kind, but he knew that arrests in general could only spell large trouble in his neighborhood. He shrugged and turned away.

Back at her apartment, Stella left a call at the North City Precinct for Detective Monahan, who was not in. Then, going to the bedroom closet to hide Babe Ruth’s bat behind some extra pillows, just in case, she spotted the undumped paper bag of old magazines. She picked it up and headed down the hallway.

As she dropped the magazines down the chute she expected, without thinking about it, to hear them send back a loud noise when they finally arrived at the Dumpster eleven stories below. It didn’t happen that way. Instead, there was a flat-sounding *thunk*, and it came well before the bundle had time

to arrive at the Dumpster.

“What the hell?” she said, employing a phrase she had last used the night she found her Walter writhing on the bathroom floor in the throes of his final heart attack.

Two minutes later she was peering down the dim chute with the aid of the flashlight she owned in case of earthquakes or power outages. The yellow beam quickly spotted an assortment of trash, suspended surely no more than three or four floors below. There were her magazines, and a small collection of plastic garbage bags. And, if she were not mistaken, the corner of a picture frame barely visible among them.

As she lowered the door to the chute, she noticed the two narrow, parallel depressions in the gray carpet, nearly obliterated by shoe prints. It was as she leaned down to examine them more closely that she spotted the green button on the floor. Without experiencing her usual sense of distaste, she thought about a red and blue Hawaiian shirt with green buttons.

“Oh, my God!” she said.

An hour later, with Detective Monahan in charge, it was determined that the blockage in the garbage chute was between the seventh and eighth floors. A uniformed policeman, taller

but no bigger around than Joey Mazer, entered the eighth-floor trash disposal room carrying a long pole with a hook on one end, a coil of rope, and what appeared to be a short rope ladder. Another cop seemed dedicated to the task of keeping the room's doors closed in the faces of Stella, Gertrude, Minerva, and a trio of other senior citizens clustered in the hallway.

The door opened once, briefly, enough for Stella to note a small pile of white plastic bags and several ballplayer photos leaning against them. Someone's sack had burst open, and the aroma of deceased fish assailed her nostrils.

A bit later Monahan emerged from the tiny room and ordered the onlookers to disperse. Stella turned away, but not before she had managed to peer past the detective's shoulder and glimpse a red and blue Hawaiian pattern against the gray of the carpet. At least, she told herself, the poor soul had not suffered the indignity of coming to rest in a Dumpster full of garbage.

For reasons not entirely clear to Stella, they chose to gather in Joey's bare-walled apartment, just the three of them. Stella sat beside Gertrude on the sofa, making consoling sounds, though Gertrude seemed to be holding up remarkably

well in view of the death of her stepbrother. Minerva kept moving from place to place, staring at nothing with those brown eyes that seemed larger than ever now because her face had lost its color.

Soon Detective Monahan came in, accompanied by a barrel-chested man whom he introduced as Detective Brodsky of Homicide.

Brodsky looked immediately at Stella. "I understand you're the one who recovered the baseball bat. We suspect what you brought us was the murder weapon, but we won't know for sure till we have it examined. Maybe not even then, because it's been used a bit today. In the meantime, we're trying to find the young man who gave it to you."

"Oh, don't be too harsh on Joaquin. I've now decided he was telling me the truth," said Stella, grimacing as she recalled how difficult it had been to overcome her honest inclination in arriving at that decision. "I think Joseph's killer panicked and got rid of the bat, and then realized perhaps that the body could be disposed of the same way."

Brodsky, his wide bottom now settled tightly in Billy Martin's swivel chair, leaned forward. "You're suggesting that the killer got the idea of pushing



the body down that chute only after dropping the bat down it?"

Stella nodded. "If the body had gone first, wouldn't the bat have hung up on it—on the body, where it had become wedged partway down the chute? Just like Joseph's photos did, and the bags of garbage people tossed in later?"

"Pretty obvious," said Brodsky. "Are we supposed to make anything of it?"

Stella had been trying to make something of it for the past half hour, and by now her mental muddle was beginning to sort itself out.

"If the killer knew about the garbage chute," she said, "he—or she—probably knew the Dumpster would be emptied this morning; it always is on Wednesdays. So, with luck, Joseph's body would be carted away and disappear forever in a sanitary landfill."

"Interesting," Brodsky conceded. "People would think he had just run away. My colleague here theorized a bit along those lines at first. So he went to Mr. Mazer's bank to find whether there'd been any large withdrawals in the past few days. Such a withdrawal might have indicated that Mr. Mazer intended to vanish. Why don't you tell them what you found, Dave?"

Detective Monahan looked

uncomfortable as he studied the three women. Stella suspected that the police were accustomed to talking with only one person—one *suspect*?—at a time.

"There weren't no withdrawals," Monahan said, and Stella didn't even wince. "I did, though, turn up one piece of interesting information. I found out the deceased—of course, I didn't know he was deceased at the time—he owned nearly a million bucks' worth of securities through that bank. All quite conservative—CD's, money market accounts, that sort of thing."

"You knew that, of course, Miss Mazer?" Brodsky fired the question almost before Monahan's last words were out.

Gertrude's mouth fell open, closed, opened again. "Why, yes. Yes, I knew."

"Did your brother have any relatives besides you?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then upon his death," said Brodsky, "you stood to inherit his entire estate, I take it. Unless, of course, he chose to will it to someone else."

The detective glanced meaningfully toward Minerva. Stella was impressed; the police had done their homework quickly.

"Joey didn't have a will," Gertrude said firmly.

"Ah, but he did," said Monahan. "He talked to the bank's

trust department about making one out. They sent him to a lawyer. As of two days ago he had a will—leaving nearly everything to Ms. Minerva Helgeson here."

Gertrude's face went red. "He never told me that."

"But when you learned he was going to marry Ms. Helgeson, didn't you suspect he might do some such thing?"

Gertrude nodded, lowering her head. "I suppose so. And, after I've watched over him all these years?"

Gertrude's shoulders were shaking. The sofa was shaking. Stella looked from one detective to the other, fascinated. It was Detective Brodsky who broke the brief silence.

"Your brother wasn't very large, Miss Mazer. Even so, assuming he was killed right here, it would seem to have needed a pretty strong person to lug his body out to the trash chute."

All eyes were on Gertrude, who obviously was a pretty strong person. All eyes but Stella's.

"Not necessarily," Stella found herself saying.

"Not necessarily what?" asked Brodsky.

"It would not necessarily require a strong person." Stella pushed herself off the sofa and shuffled across the room to Brodsky, whose bulk was still

comfortably ensconced in the Billy Martin chair.

"Sit up straight, please," she ordered him. "And lift your feet off the floor."

He looked up at her in surprise, then silently complied with her order. Stella grasped the back of the chair firmly. Ignoring the bursitic pain in her shoulders, she swung it around and pushed.

The chair rolled easily on its casters. She heard Brodsky swear softly as he sat there motionless, like an invalid in a wheelchair. Turning the chair again, she pushed it through the arched doorway and into the entry hall, with all two hundred pounds of Detective Brodsky still aboard.

Back in the living room, not even short of breath, she sat down and addressed her audience.

"You see," she said. "If an arthritic old woman can push that chair with a large man in it, *anyone* could push it with a small man in it—dead or alive. Even Minerva."

Minerva, her petite form looking lost in a barrel chair in the room's far corner, lifted a hand, let it flutter back into her lap.

"What does that prove?" she demanded.

"Nothing by itself," said Stella. She was beginning to

enjoy herself. "But if the police gentlemen will go out to the trash room, I think they will still be able to see the wheel marks from that chair on the carpet. It took me a while to grasp their significance. I dare say it won't take the detectives that long."

But the detectives weren't going anywhere at the moment. They looked at each other, and some kind of silent message seemed to flow between them. Then they looked at Minerva.

Brodsky, standing in the doorway, said, "Ms. Helgeson, Did you know, before Detective Monahan mentioned it, that Mr. Mazer had drawn up a will in your favor?"

His words came out rapid-fire, a bit like Stella supposed a machine gun might sound.

Minerva appeared startled. "Why, yes, we talked about it." Then she appeared angered, quite suddenly. "Say, what are you getting at? If you're trying to accuse me— So I was in his will. We were getting married. I wasn't going to be lonely any more. Why would I have killed him?"

"Ms. Helgeson, do you know how all those ballplayer pictures happened to get tossed down the garbage chute?" Rapid-fire again. From Monahan this time.

Minerva looked from one de-

tective to the other, then away. Her eyes, no longer limpid pools, met Stella's and sent a chill down Stella's spine.

"Those horrid, little-boy baseball things." She spat out the words. "I couldn't stand them. I took them down because I was getting ready to move in with Joey. It's a woman's right to have some say in how her home is decorated."

"You threw them down the chute?" asked Brodsky.

"I meant just to have him put them in storage."

"You didn't answer my question, Ms. Helgeson. Why don't you just tell us exactly what happened?"

Stella could see exactly what was happening right here, right now. Minerva's aplomb was disintegrating under the two-man barrage.

"All right," said Minerva, "so Joey came in just as I finished taking down his damned pictures. I didn't know he had such an awful temper. He yelled and threatened me. So I threw them down the garbage."

"You threw them," Monahan reminded her, "after his body went down the garbage. They hung up on his body."

Minerva's head was bowed, and tears dripped onto her designer outfit. "Like I said. He threatened me."

"Threatened you physically."

"Yes. Every way. I had to defend myself."

"Hogwash!" Gertrude entered the discussion like a bursting pipe bomb. "Joey had a temper. But there wasn't a violent bone in his body. He never threatened anybody in his life."

"He did! He even threatened to cancel—said he was going to cancel the will!" The tears came then in a flood, and Minerva's hands flew up and covered her face. She had trapped herself and, Stella saw with some satisfaction, was just now fully realizing it.

With all attention focused on

a tearful Minerva, Stella slipped from the room unnoticed. She walked down the hall toward her own apartment. She was so tired her bones ached. If the police wanted to know how it was that she had recognized Minerva's guilt before they did, they could jolly well wait a few hours. Then she would tell them: Sure, Gertrude might have been capable of killing in order to prevent her stepbrother from making out that will. But after all, if she had put up with Joey's foibles all these years, she certainly wouldn't have thrown out his bizebull mementoes this late in the game.

---

## **SOLUTION TO THE NOVEMBER "UNSOLVED":**

---

Cam Lindsey suspects Bentley Threndyle may really be Morton Threndyle. Although they are identical twins, or at least sufficiently identical to fool all but the more careful examination, it is Bentley who cannot walk and must use a wheelchair. Yet Cam saw the paint dripping from Bentley's (or Morton's) pantlegs into the creases in his shoes. Someone who does not walk would not have creases in his shoes.

# Cut and Run

by Dan Crawford



There was enough of a moon to see by, which Polijn considered a double-edged blessing. It hardly mattered that she could see where she was going since she didn't know where to go. And if she could see, she could also be seen.

She had to get moving. This was high summer, and the odor of the bodies would soon draw scavengers, on varying numbers of legs. Her hiding place under the smashed wagon that had carried the caravan's wine had hidden her from the combatants, but they'd been preoccupied. It would not long baffle the painstaking looters. Then, too, the duke's men, or the count's men, or both, might be back at any moment, and mistake her for a looter.

So Polijn, keeping low, scrambled past the oxen and the discarded wedding finery until she hit the road. She rose to her knees then. Would it be safer to keep away from the road, and the presumably advancing soldiery, or to just make a dash along it as far as it was safe? And make a dash where? She looked left and right.

To the right she saw a tall figure moving from shadow to shadow. She dropped to all fours and set off as quickly and quietly as possible to the left.

She hadn't gone more than twice the length of her small

body before thudding footfalls told her she'd been seen. Gathering her feet under her, she jumped upright and started to run. No breath was wasted calling for help; no one who would help her could hear her.

"Ha!" cried her pursuer. Polijn glanced back as the moonlight hit a grin of gleaming teeth. She veered off the road and across country; there'd be more hiding places. Her big sister back home had told her stories of toothy gentlemen who prowled on moonlit nights to drain the blood of the unwary.

A hand got a grip amid her flying hair and yanked back. An arm caught her around the chest. Polijn twisted and kicked. The arm that held her was muscled, accomplished, and familiar; Polijn was lifted and then thrown down into the grass.

"Well!" said Carasta, sitting on her stomach. "Should've known a Rossacottan born would come out of that alive. How've ye been, kid?"

"I'm okay," Polijn gasped. "You?"

"Miserable, thanks," the man replied, bouncing a little. "Bruised from head to toe, with a lump the size of the fist that hit me on the head. And then you go kicking me."

Polijn swallowed some air before saying, "Sorry. I thought

"Yeah," Carasta said, sliding

off her onto the ground. "I don't blame you. It's been that kinda day." He put a hand to his irregular forehead. "Never thought this job would be such a headache."

Twelve hours earlier, Carasta and Polijn had been trying to convince Burbnak, caravan master for the Count of Bihree, that they were minstrels worthy to accompany the count's daughter Ymile, on her way to marry a prince of Aro.

"Kick your legs higher, kid," Carasta had growled, banging on his tambourine. "Yer skirt's not that short just because it's summer."

Burbnak had stood it as long as he could and then said, "Enough. The girl's voice isn't bad, and the more noise we make when we get to Aro, the better it'll look. If I hear of you thieving, though, you'll hang from the first tree we come to."

By Carasta's standards, this was a warm welcome. "I told ye I'd get us in," he said, pinching her for punctuation. "But try to follow me better next time we sing that piece together."

Following Carasta's voice was like chasing chickens. Polijn had sung duets with the inept before, but Carasta seemed to be bad on purpose.

Still, for the first time since they had been banished from Rossacotta, they had managed to insinuate themselves into a

noble family's support group, if only on the fringes and tentuously at that. Carasta was further able to get them a ride on the wagonload of wine casks by arguing that even he could not steal a wine cask while the cart was moving and by promising the driver something Polijn didn't quite catch but was afraid she'd hear about later on.

From where she sat, Polijn could see the noble Ymile, and even hear her frequent complaints about the heat in her carriage. Before Polijn could gather the courage to suggest to Carasta that what Ymile needed was a singer to keep her company, her ladyship had drifted off to sleep among a dozen pillows, ignoring the way the expensive gauze that eight pairs of hands had arranged about her person was creeping up her thighs.

Ymile was a delicate, golden-haired beauty with a perfect bow of a mouth and long-lashed eyes. Life in the slums of Rossacotta had left Polijn with no illusions about the beautiful. At home, the prettier a person was, the more likely she had taken part in a number of undecorative or downright clumsy interludes. It was Polijn's opinion that the shape of those begauzed thighs was due to something more than the barley sugar candies Lady Ymile had been consuming



"What was that?" grumbled her ladyship, startled awake by the sound of a horn.

"One of the outriders coming to report, milady," said one of her bodyguards.

"Well, tell him to hush," said Ymile, closing her eyes again. "I'm going to be up all night."

The outrider did not hush but came galloping up to the procession. "Horsemen!" he shouted, reining in his own mount. "Bearing Noldon's banner!"

There were enough petty tyrants per square mile in this part of the world to insure pretty near constant warfare. Any map of the area showed such a jumbled collection of tiny patches that the region was known as the Northern Quilt.

Carasta scratched at the eyebrow that showed above his eyepatch. "I'd guess this Noldon is no frienda the count."

It was a good guess. Quivers of long grey arrows were being unloaded and handed around to the men of the caravan. "What do we do now?" Polijn asked him.

Her protector moved to the end of the wagon and jumped to the ground. "If we run, they'll think we're spies for this Noldon. I'll see if there's some place for noncombatant artists to take shelter."

He looked both ways and slid along the line of wagons. Polijn

watched until he disappeared beyond a pair of archers and then clawed her way down inside the straw between the wine casks. Carasta might be back and he might not. He could sneak off more easily without Polijn tagging along.

In either case, it did no harm to pay some of her own attention to the problems of survival. The best she could hope for if there was a battle was to be killed, maimed, or taken as booty. So she made herself a burrow among the casks and hoped no one would set the wagons on fire.

The general shouting grew louder, and there was a sound of approaching hoofbeats. A trumpeter blasted his horn.

"Who comes to disturb this procession?" a herald demanded. "Know that this is the retinue of Lady Ymile, daughter of . . ." This name afforded him no protection; his proclamation ended in a strangled scream of mortal pain.

"Have at them!" ordered Lady Ymile. Polijn peered out between two casks to see where the count's daughter was, but hadn't found her when the world was rocked by an explosion.

She caught hold of the iron band around a cask and pulled herself out, averting a broken leg as the barrels crashed together. The cart was tipping to the left. Polijn scrambled to the

edge and jumped clear. Landing on all fours, she watched the wagon roll, tossing its cargo across the road. It was not built to move in that fashion, though, and soon came to a halt. Polijn dived back under it as a horse jumped over her, barely clearing her head.

From where she lay she could see the Lady Ymile, screaming an opinion of the Duke of Noldon and then of the count's men for not winning an immediate victory. Despite (or because of) her insults, her bodyguard was battling hard.

Red light from the sky bathed her ladyship. She turned to face its source, and vanished. A burly man in rich armor pulled up next to the toppled wine wagon.

"The Lady Ymile was to be my hostage if I distracted the rest for you to take!" he shouted.

An echoing voice replied, "Those I do not need will be returned to thee."

Horses reared at the sound, and even oxen looked up. Polijn stuck her head out of the shelter to see a tall man floating above the road. He was swathed in flowing robes of green and gold, and in hands studded with dagger-like nails he held two burning standards that cast rays of red light around the field. A fleeing horse and rider ran into the light, and the horse fled on alone.

The light was selective, tak-

ing some, leaving others. Those who remained tried to fight against increasing odds or, less wisely, attempted to escape. There was nowhere to run; the Duke of Noldon's men had the count's men surrounded. Polijn ducked back into her refuge.

The screaming and hacking went on for hours before it gradually faded into the thud of retreating hooves and the moans of the wounded. The cart Polijn hid under was never looted; she assumed this meant the battle had ended in a tie, with a mutual retreat to collect reinforcements. Once night and silence had fallen, she had crept free, only to be captured by her partner.

She was not a bit surprised that Carasta had survived, only that he had lingered. "Well, let's move on," he said, rising from her stomach. "They'll be back sometime, and I wouldn't want them to see me with these clothes."

Polijn couldn't see anything wrong with Carasta's clothes. Looking closer, though, she saw he had at least three expensive gowns, part of Lady Ymile's trousseau, tied around his waist. If caught with those, he'd be slain on the spot as a looter.

"Here," he said, unwinding them from his waist, "take them."

Polijn sighed, and added them to her pack. Carasta pulled her

to her feet. "Come on. Not along the road, though. Never know when or where they're coming. Best thing's to get far from here as fast as feet will carry."

He set off straight across the field at the left of the road. Polijn followed. They did move as quickly as they could, but this didn't get them very far very fast. Polijn was city-bred, and Carasta a minstrel who had stuck to the main-travelled roads through most of his career. Neither of them was used to travel through rocky, rolling meadows.

"Lintik!" cried Carasta, stubbing his toe on a rock hidden by shadows. "I should have known we'd be brought to this. Mind that, kid, if you ever meet another caravan master. Watch for that stupid look in their eyes, and that round, puggly nose. That kind'll lead you right into trouble. I knew the minute he called our music noise that he was a man of no discrimination. A man without discrimination will always lead you into trouble by the quickest road, not knowing no better."

Polijn, as was her custom, said nothing. Carasta hated to be interrupted, and wasn't interested in anything she had to say anyway.

She'd been with him now for two months. Accidentally caught up with a group deemed treasonous by the Rossacotta

government, she'd been shipped out of the country with two dozen other exiles. Among them had been the minstrel Carasta, deported for general rascality. He had the rakish air of the rascal, a result of his eyepatch and a sturdy sense of self-worth that showed in his swagger.

He had the rascal's habitual optimism, too. Concluding his eulogy on the caravan master, he went on, "But we're well shut of them, and what a story we'll have to tell 'em in the next village. Disrupted wedding procession, missing heroine, battles, a sorcerer . . . you think me up a good tune and I'll give you the details."

This was not a bad idea, and Polijn searched her memory for a good tune that was in Carasta's range. She picked out an all-purpose melody and Carasta started to describe the disruption of the caravan. But since he had apparently spent most of the battle down inside one of the wardrobe wagons, Polijn was called upon to corroborate, then embellish, and finally provide all the details herself.

Carasta eventually judged they were far enough from the road to stop for the night and called a halt. Polijn recited the song for him as far as they had gotten with it as she spread their one blanket flat on the ground.

"Very serviceable," Carasta told her, sitting down and tearing their evening bread ration in half. "Run through it once or twice more and you'll have it. Shows promise." He nodded as Polijn began again; the bread kept him from making further comment.

Polijn knew very well whose work it was that kept them in bread and cheese. Music was not Carasta's strong point; his main stock in trade consisted of wildly improbable tales of how he had lost his eye. Laisida had called his type "cutpurse minstrels," the sort of artists who use their talents to distract an audience from its troubles, such as the uselessness of the miracle elixir they are selling, or the fact that their partner is picking their pockets.

And he wasn't even especially good at that. He had admitted once, in a mellow mood, that he had not eaten so regularly on the road before acquiring her as assistant. This he attributed more to what he called her "cute little face" than to innate talent. Carasta knew she had talent; he just felt it needed refining. That was why he "taught her the tricks," telling her to swing her shoulders more, to sit up straighter, to smile, dispensing each bit of advice as though it were a drop of brilliance. To expand her repertoire (and marketability), he

had also instructed her in what he called the "arts of love." Polijn thought it was a funny phrase, but then he called his singing an art and that was pretty rough, too.

If there had been any way for her to unload his escort without getting into something worse, Polijn would have done so; Carasta was one of her last links to home, but she still had more brains than nostalgia. Crude as it was, though, Carasta's protection was vital to survival. Polijn's mother had always told her a woman needed a man for protection in the cold, dirty world. "They might as well make themselves useful," was the way she put it.

Polijn had spent her life behind masculine shelters of varying effectiveness: Ronar, her mother's manager, then Ynygny, Arherth, and Laisida, musicians who felt her odd voice showed promise and gave her a background in music that even Carasta's instruction couldn't erase, and then the mad sorcerer who called himself the Vielfrass and who had, for reasons best known to himself, given her the amulet at her neck, the only gold she had ever owned.

She slid it out from inside her collar. It was no more than a golden disc with a milled edge, its surface bare but for a symbol without much meaning for Po-

lijn. In Rossacotta, though, it would reduce a viewer to incoherence. This was not, in Polijn's opinion, a mystic power. People simply recognized it as the symbol of the Vielfrass, a sorcerer, and thus the symbol meant, to them, "There's somebody bigger than you, so bow low." It was one of the basic laws of Rossacotta.

Out of the corner of one eye, Polijn saw a thumb next to her thigh. She tried to skid to one side, but Carasta was too quick and commanded her attention with a good, solid pinch. The man was as crazy as the Vielfrass and as demanding as Ronar. To be sure, despite a mean pinch, he never beat her, as had been Ronar's habit.

"Got plans for you and that amulet," he said, around a mouthful of cheese. "Bout time we found a use for it."

Polijn closed her hand over the ornament. So far, Carasta had shied away from pawning or selling the golden amulet. It might really have powers, or the Vielfrass might somehow come to hear about the sale, so he said it wasn't safe. Maybe now they were far enough away so that he'd risk it.

"I'll do the talking," he went on. "It takes someone who's tongue-nimble. Someday you'll be able to flirt with the husbands and sympathize with the wives, kid, but not yet."

She dropped the disc back inside her tunic. "What do you want me to do?"

He pointed a finger at her. "You don't do a thing—I know you're up to that—just stand there and be your own sweet, sour self." Polijn paid so much attention to that finger she ignored his free hand, and jumped as he pinched her again. "And just hold up the thing when I point at you. We'll hook them that way."

Polijn wondered whether she was entitled to more details. Carasta told her without being asked, and she wished she had asked so he might have refused to tell her. With luck, though, it was a long way to the next village. He might think up a more dependable plan before they got there.

As fortune would have it, their mouths still held bits of their breakfast bread and cheese when they found themselves nearing a small town next morning. A smell of fried parsnips reminded Polijn of home and her older sister Mokono, who did the cooking. Carasta's mouth watered, too, but at the signs of prosperity in the village. They had come out of the fields onto the main road again, and the cottages all along the way were hung with flowers and bore a fresh coat of paint.

"If they're having a festival, we'll do doubly well," the min-

strel whispered to his young partner.

They caught glimpses of one or two people in what were obviously holiday clothes, but the first person they caught up with was a morose man pushing a cart in which parsnips were cooking. "It must be a festival," said Carasta.

"Good day, good sir," he called, in the formal tones he used for speaking to crowds and customers. "What town is this?"

The parsnip vendor's gaze was not encouraging. "Mero-fled, stranger."

Carasta was not at all abashed. "Thank you!" he replied. He brandished a hand to point up the road. "Is there a town square in this direction?"

The man's head tipped up a little. "There is."

"Ah!" said Carasta. Without another word, he marched onward, Polijn trotting behind him. Behind her, Polijn heard cartwheels crunch along the roadway; the parsnip vendor's curiosity had been piqued.

She didn't look back, but her ears told her when he was joined by his neighbors and other townspeople. "Who's the stranger?" "He didn't say." "I don't like his looks." "Is that his little brother? What's wrong with his ears?" "I wonder how he lost the eye." Polijn could also hear Carasta chortling. So far, his plan was operating per-

fectly. But this was the easy part.

The town square of Mero-fled was none too large but very pretty. Every building facing the square dripped with colored bunting and garlands. On the eastern side stood a platform that was either half done or in the process of being torn down. Carasta led her to this, considered it for a second, and then turned around.

He seemed startled, but not dismayed, at discovering the curious crowd. "Why, good morning, good people!" he exclaimed, with a deep bow.

Nobody replied though there was considerable muttering back in the audience. Carasta waved one little finger toward the stairs of the platform, and Polijn went to sit there.

The faces that watched her do this were studded with suspicion and gloom. Carasta could not fail to notice it.

"So sad on a day so bright under heaven's shining glory?" he demanded. He leaned toward a woman carrying a pair of towheaded babies. "To put on faces so unhappy on your village's finest morning?" he asked her, his brows bouncing up and down wickedly.

The woman took three steps back. "It hasn't been fine so far," she retorted; once at a safe distance.

His mouth dropped open from

pure shock. "Can it be that tears dim your eyes until you fail to recognize your good fortune?"

"No fortune ever came this way wearing an eyepatch!" shouted someone in the crowd.

There was a general laugh at this; which Carasta joined. "Nay, good people, I meant not me. I am but herald, only the guide to . . . Polijn."

One or two of the more foolish onlookers cheered. Polijn waited sedately, just raising a haughty eyebrow. Usually at this point she'd have kicked a tambourine. She would have preferred that right now.

"Polijn I say," Carasta hurried to repeat, before anyone could get a good look at his assistant and consider her an anticlimax. "A wizard's apprentice, fresh from the tutelage of Rolfus. I am her guide as she makes her journeyman's tour of the earth."

The crowd drew back in awe. Everyone had heard of the legendary school of wizardry ruled by the ancient Rolfus, whom time could not touch. "Yes!" Carasta told them. "You can see for yourselves the mystic amulet that marks her!"

He gave the signal, and Polijn held up the bauble to glisten in the sun. The crowd moved back again, still unsure of its safety, but someone felt secure enough to call, "Then where's

her staff?"

Carasta did not consider this worthy of comment. "We have come to Merofled out of the east," he said. "We have seen many wonders and . . ."

"From the east?" demanded a golden-bearded man, stepping to the front of the crowd.

Carasta bowed. "Yes, good sir, from the lands of . . ."

"What do you know of the Count of Bihree, then?" demanded the man, glaring at Polijn.

"What have they to do with the Count of Bihree?" asked someone farther back in the crowd.

"She's a sorceress!" cried a third voice.

"Er, good people!" called Carasta, trying to re-establish control of the audience. "You have no doubt heard of the unfortunate accident . . ."

"The wedding party was to stop here," declared the bearded man. "Dorfan's lad says the duke's men were aided by a sorcerer who flew through the sky. The sorcerer took all the high-born members of the parade, and they never came to us. We thought it might have been Silnerli . . ."

"Ah, Silnerli!" said Carasta. "Silnerli, to be sure."

The bearded man put both hands on his belt. "But here's a sorceress we don't know," he went on. "And Silnerli never



had anything against the count."

People in the crowd were nudging, pointing, nodding. Polijn saw some hand signals she didn't recognize but which were easy of comprehension. She slid her eyes left and right for a nice place to slip away. But Carasta had naturally chosen the best vantage point in the square, and they were being watched from all directions.

"Good people!" Carasta cried again, his voice cracking this time. "We don't know anything about Lady Ymile and her..."

"How did you know it was Lady Ymile then?" roared three or four voices at once.

Two or three people on Polijn's left were picking up rocks. A whistling wind from her right told her the ones on that side were a bit ahead. She ducked a rock the size of her fist. This distracted her too much for her to keep track of Carasta.

It was not so much the betrayal as the audacity of it that shocked Polijn. Carasta snatched the amulet at her neck and gave it a good yank, snapping the chain and sending Polijn sprawling in the square.

"Thank you, good people!" he screamed. "You have seen through her evil mask of innocence and broken the spell she had over me! I have her charm now and she is powerless!"

While the crowd digested this, Polijn rose to all fours and scut-

tled into their midst. She had crawled through mobs a hundred times back home and knew how it worked; a kick here, a punch there. They're bigger than you are, so go around them if they're right in your path. Keep down, keep moving; don't bother with direction until you hit open space.

She bounced around some boots directed at her and found herself on the other side of the audience. With a kick she was upright and legging it down the road. She would have had no idea where to go to cover in the fields, but she was among houses and in her element again.

"Stop her!" someone screamed. The mob thundered in pursuit.

Polijn rounded a corner and sprinted down an alley. Ten paces brought her up against a low fence. Slapping her hands on top, she vaulted over it. Then she ducked her head and threw herself backward, curling into a tiny ball against the wooden barricade.

She counted to ten and looked up. If they had seen her go into the alley, they'd expect her to keep going, and either jump over the fence themselves or go around to cut her off.

So no one would be expecting her to jump back over and sneak toward the town square again. She stood up enough to peek over the fence.

And there was the mob, arms

flailing overhead, hands brandishing broomsticks, hoes, or just hats.

"Ha!" someone bellowed. "Found out there's no way out of Senniton's yard!"

The crowd advanced. Polijn looked behind her to see that she was, indeed, standing on the edge of a courtyard enclosed on three sides by windowless buildings.

"She thought we'd blame it on Silnerli!"

"Burn her!"

"Take her head to Silnerli! Maybe he'll lower the taxes!"

At home, Polijn had witnessed fifteen murders, seen dozens of neighbors die slowly from disease; and come upon uncounted corpses, including that of her mother. So when her mind turned to death, as it frequently did, her reflections were not extensive. They consisted of "Is it time yet?" and "Well, I guess so. Let's get it over with."

She backed slowly away from the fence. The crowd was in no hurry. She tried to count them as they came and estimate the number of torches they had with them on such a sunny day. Every hand that had a torch in it, after all, was not encumbered by a club.

Impending death didn't worry her so much as the accompanying injury. She had seen it happen time and again, but she still didn't understand why it

was necessary to break every bone belonging to someone you were just going to kill later anyway. It seemed redundant, wasted effort.

They tore down the fences; someone said something about cheap, handy firewood. Polijn felt stone at her back, and bit her lip.

Then thirty people fell down as the sky roared.

Polijn was one of them. She raised her face to see an apparition descending from the sky. Others in the crowd had already done so and recognized it.

"Silnerli!"

"The sorcerer!"

"We have her, master! She's here!"

Soon everyone in the crowd was crying out something based on one of these three themes. Rough hands seized Polijn's shoulders and hauled her upright. Those nearest her pointed and screamed as loudly as possible, each claiming credit for personally subduing the dangerous witch. Polijn could do little more than try to dodge the hardest of the cuffs and kicks aimed at her.

The tall man continued to step down through the sky. His face was frozen in cold distaste; at the sight of it, the cheering faltered.

He stopped, some four feet above the heads of the crowd, and cleared his throat.

The whole town fell into dead silence.

A cold, ageless face turned to study the townspeople. The sorcerer's eyes met Polijn's for a second, and passed on, uninterested.

"I have traced the power source I seek to Mero fled. Who has taken it from Lady Ymile's procession, and where is it?"

Silnerli was displeased. Those directly under his feet fell to the ground, and everyone else pulled back. Everyone who had been shouting to attract his attention now crouched behind a neighbor. The hands that had held Polijn released their grip.

An arm long enough to have accommodated two elbows shot out from the sorcerer's robes to point into the cowering crowd. "What is that?" inquired a voice like thunder.

No one replied. "What is that?" Silnerli repeated, his brows coming together.

The voice that replied was tiny, but recognizable. "Barely a bauble, good master. A gift from my mother."

Carasta crouched alone at the center of a circle of retreating citizens. He held an amulet over his head. The sight of it brought Polijn's mind back to immediate concerns. She glanced left and right. No one stopped her as she stepped backward to the wall behind her and then slid along it

through the crowd of people whose eyes were filled with the sorcerer's glow.

"Master," one ventured. "The Lady Ymile; is she . . ."

"Silence!"

Polijn turned a corner. Once she was sure she was out of sight of the sorcerer, she picked up speed. When she was far enough away so that she couldn't hear the crowd, she turned and ran, not looking back. She kept running along the road until she found herself outside Mero fled.

Since pursuit was by no means unlikely, she took off cross-country. This was slower going; the terrain was rough, a thin layer of soil over the rocks. She kept up a trot along one edge of a goat-strewn meadow and found herself among trees. This meant she really had to slow down, and she did so without regret. No path led through the timber; surely anyone who walked here would make enough noise for her to hear, giving her time to go to ground.

Now that she had time to think, Polijn wondered where she ought to go next. Carasta always followed the road wherever it took him, but she didn't have the guidance of Carasta or a road now. There were no milestones to give her a hint, and it would be ridiculous to expect any recognizable landmarks.

Unless, she thought, study-

ing the dead tree she was passing, they burnt the trees off at just that angle as some sort of signal. She'd have to keep her eyes open for another one, if so.

Polijn did see another tree with the top burnt off at that angle, and then a third, and this cheered her only as long as it took for her to reach the fourth and recognize the stump next to it. Of course it was not a pattern of four dead trees at even intervals, but the same dead tree four times.

She sat down on the stump and sank her nails into her knees. The songs were full of travelers who wandered in circles, but she'd never thought of it as something that happened outside a song. She kicked a leaf away from her toe.

Sighing, she stood up. There was nothing for it, then, but to go back to the road and hope the people of Merofled had given up on her. She just had to find her way back to that goat pasture.

Minutes later, Polijn had found her way back to the stump and the burnt tree. She sat down again, and scratched her head. It was hot going, through the pathless undergrowth, and any seat was welcome. She closed her eyes and sank back in the shade.

Then she opened her eyes and sat up again. "Shade!" she said. She stood and looked up at the

sky. There was a gap where once the dead tree had raised its leaves. Straight, unfiltered sunlight could get through there, to cast a shadow. Surely those shadows pointed east, if it was as late in the day as her stomach was telling her. Merofled was to the east.

Polijn studied the shadows and then struck off into the forest. Enough sunlight made its way through the leaves to justify her direction, and she kept moving. West was mainly uphill, it seemed, but at least she didn't come back to the blasted treetrunk.

The shadows lengthened and thickened as she moved along until finally she gave in. Glad, for a change, that she had been the pack horse of the group, she unrolled her blanket on the ground and took out the last crusts of bread.

Something crackled behind her. She froze and waited for the sound to come again. It didn't. That was what she hated most about the country. Everything was so quiet that when you did hear something, it sounded like the crash of worlds.

A leaf blew onto the blanket and she jumped. She rose to her knees, ready to run if whatever had dislodged the leaf was dangerous. She was alone now; she had to keep her own guard against predators.

The sooner she was out of

these woods, she decided, the better it would be. Not that the road would be much of an improvement. Though she might be too far from Merofled to fear pursuit, there were plenty of others who would be willing to tackle one person, undersized, alone.

If she could get there without running afoul of any more sorcerers, the duke's court might provide her with shelter. A new minstrel was always a novelty, and she could tell the tale of his soldiers and their heroic assault on Lady Ymile's caravan. They would tire of her eventually, of course, but by then, perhaps, some other traveling minstrel, more musically inclined than Carasta, might pass through and need an . . .

She was almost sitting down again when a rustle and a crackle in the undergrowth brought her onto the alert. It was too dark for her to pick out anything moving among the trees. She scanned the area and reached toward her pack for the flint. Perhaps a small fire would do the trick.

A body hit the blanket, right beside her. Polijn's hand was on her eating knife before she could think. Another hand was there before hers.

"Whew!" said the newcomer as Polijn tried to pull away. "We got out of some deep woods

there! Hadn't been for quick thinkin' by both of us, we'd be roasting now!"

Polijn stared up at the man's face but didn't really need to see the eyepatch. "Here," he said, relieving her of the bread. "I'm starved."

"H . . . how did you find me?" Polijn demanded.

"Got away from the cheering crowds as soon as I could," he said, rubbing his throat. "I was gonna hide out in the woods, but then I saw the footprints. Figured it was you, by the size, but if it wasn't, maybe whoever it was would give me some supper." He took a bite of the bread and went on, around it. "Boy, have we got a story for the next stop."

Polijn stared at him for a long time as he outlined his plans for his new masterpiece. He didn't seem to notice. Her hand slid back toward her knife, but slid right over it to her belt. No. She still needed a guide, at least as far as the duke's court. But there would be a new escort for her when she left. She promised herself that.

Leaning back, she watched him eat up the last of their food supply. Her eyelids drooped; there was no novelty to watching Carasta eat.

The eyes did not come open again until dawn. A weight was hanging on her shoulders. She

reached up to make sure it wasn't from Carasta's hands before she tried to shake it loose. Her fingers brushed metal.

Polijn clamped her hands around the chain. She knew it without looking at it. Visions of Carasta standing off an angry sorcerer to bring her amulet back, tenderly and secretly putting it around her neck as she slept, flitted through her mind.

She shook them out. A minstrel recited fantasies; she didn't try to live in them.

"Hey!" she whispered, thrusting her elbow back. "Look at this!"

"Wunh?" Carasta inquired, raising his head far enough to see over her shoulder. A ray of early sunlight hit the gold disc and bounced into his face.

"Wunh?" he said again, putting his hands up, and then "Eeyah!" He kicked out with both feet to put distance between himself and the bit of gold.

That pretty well put paid to any idea of his having put it there, Polijn decided, rubbing her bruised back as she stood up. "A homer!" whispered Carasta, in awe.

Polijn bounced the heavy disc in her hand. "Do you think he brought it back?"

The man's face brightened.

"He could have! He coulda..." Then his head started to swing back and forth. "No."

He backed away as Polijn approached. She stopped. "Then how did it get there?" she demanded.

Carasta held up both hands, palm out. "Din't you ever hear the story of Romulag, kid? It's a homer; the wizard gives a guy an amulet that always comes back to him, no matter what." His brows came down and his underlip pushed out. "Wish we'd known that before. We coulda been eating off it in every village on the road."

Polijn looked at the bauble with new interest. It was possible. She had never heard of Romulag, but she hoped there were plenty of songs she hadn't heard yet. A neat trick; she could see Carasta's point. Pay for your room and meal with the gold, leave town, and the amulet would reappear in the morning; it was foolproof. Of course, the landlord would be upset, but you'd be long gone and he couldn't...

But a sorcerer could come after. And would.

"I think he just brought it back," she said, loudly and without conviction. "It's not a homer. He just realized it ... wasn't anything he could use and brought it back."

Carasta's good eye told her he

knew as well as she did how much faith she put in that. "You didn't see him up close, kid," he said. "He's not one to let go of something once he has his claws around it." He looked around the forest and went to roll up the blanket. "Best to get undercover then," he said. "The farther away from those icy eyes, the better."

Polijn had no objections, so they struck off through the forest. Travel among the trees was no easier, though, than it had been on the previous day, and there were rocks tumbled from the slopes to their north to make it difficult. "Well," said Carasta, tripping in matted branches for the seventh time that morning, "it's a good sign anyhow. Shows nobody's been this way in years."

Gradually they worked into an older section of the woods. At least there were plenty of huge, rotting stumps on every side. The undergrowth was less extensive, too, and the ground firmer underfoot. They made good time and Carasta, cheerful now, began to whistle.

Polijn wished he wouldn't, even leaving aside the fact that he couldn't have carried a tune if he'd had three hands. There was something unusual about this part of the forest. It was a foolish notion, knowing as little as she did about trees, or nature in general, but those rotten old

trunks ahead of her, so broken, so dead, so . . . so similar.

She frowned, and began to count her steps. Ten steps, black stump on the right, ten steps, black stump on the left, ten steps, stump on the right, ten steps, stump. These trees had been planted this way, long ago, to form a canopy over a broad path. A path to what, she wondered, and, more to the point, were they walking toward it or away from it?

She turned to consult Carasta, who was not there.

Freezing, she surveyed the forest. Now that she was looking for it, she could see the pattern of the other trees, how they formed a shell around a vacancy left behind by a long-dead corridor of mighty lords of the forest. Surely something like this couldn't have been maintained without help; something must have kept seeds from landing and growing in the path itself.

But she couldn't see any groundskeepers in the green ceiling. And she couldn't see the one-eyed minstrel anywhere, anywhere at all.

"Hey!" he shouted.

Polijn looked down, and then up. "Where are you?" she called, in a voice low but piercing. "Are you hurt?"

"Well, it don't feel good," he told her. "But I need a torch. Throw me down the flint."



"The flint?" she demanded. "But . . . throw it down where?"

"Can you tell what direction my voice is coming from?" he called. He started humming "The Hot Feather Bed."

The voice came from below and . . . off to the left, she decided. Behind her. "Yes," she called.

"Come twelve steps toward it," he ordered. "Count 'em now. Just twelve. And keep an eye out for that sorcerer."

Polijn glanced up into the canopy of leaves and began to count. "One, two, three, fo . . ."

When she realized there was grass but no dirt under that fourth step, Polijn jerked back and twisted to her right. But she had gone too far forward to escape. Still clutching the flint, she bounced down a steep and not perfectly smooth stone ramp. The light from above ground vanished almost immediately, so she stopped trying to do anything about her plight and wrapped her arms around her head instead.

So it was that an elbow, and not her skull, hit the stone wall at the end of the slide with a smack. She stayed where she was, curled into a ball, to catch her breath and find out whether anything more was going to happen.

A hand slid across her body and pried the fingers away from the flint. "Thought that'd get

you down here," said Carasta.

Polijn let go of her head and glowered in the direction of the voice. Carasta had never been good at fires, so she had ample time to get her wind back before a spark caught whatever tinder he had waiting for it.

"Yeah," he said. "Felt like torchstuff. Not good, but it'll do."

Polijn stared at the light and the hand that held it. Carasta handed the torch he'd found to her and grabbed another little bundle off the floor. It was a second torch: straw and, by the smell of it, pitch tacked to a long handle. A dozen more torches were stacked neatly around his feet.

"Whaddya think?" he said, lighting the second torch from the first. "Looks like I found a good place to lie low a couple of days while Silnerli looks for us."

Polijn rubbed her bruised elbow. "We're out of food," she snapped. "We can't stay anywhere for a couple of days."

Carasta waved the torch and sent light rippling up the sides of the little chamber. "Come on," he said. "Don't you know yer own songs? There's always an underground river in these big caves, in the songs anyhow, and there'll be fish." He turned away and took three steps. "Look there!"

A tunnel-like hallway led

away from them into the darkness, with small square patches of darkness at regular intervals on both sides. The intervals were a little too regular to suit Polijn.

"You know, this is probably a bandit's cave," she told him, standing up. And lots of bandits, too, she figured, counting the doors.

"Of course," said Carasta, his tone much too hearty. "We just came in at the wrong end. But look, if they were here, they'd be here: hearing us, you know. The place is deserted." He strode forward. "If they left the torches behind, maybe they left something better."

At the first doorway he thrust his torch in first, and then his head. "Ha! What'd I tell you?"

Polijn walked to his side, casting her eyes up the corridor for any signs of the inhabitants. "Got your pack?" Carasta demanded.

He was pointing at a heap of tumbled clothes, obviously rich, from somebody's bygone booty. "You get the best of that, especially jewelry if you see any, and we'll hock it in the next town. I'll check the next room. If you hear anybody but me, head for the ramp. Don't wait for me because I'll be there already."

Polijn thought that very likely. What was not likely was Carasta's volunteering to check

the other rooms. She shrugged: greed could overpower even fear. Once he was gone, she bent over the stack of booty. The clothes were heavy, well-made, and not dusty at all. Either this was a very clean cave or they had found some very recent loot.

"Ayackatouri!" she snapped. One big spark from the torch had landed on her hand at the same time that a second flew into her face. She slapped at both at once.

Then she kicked the torch out of the pile of clothes, stepping furiously on burning fragments. There was no point in burning the stuff; if they didn't get away with it, this would just annoy the current owners.

Polijn stared across the room at the door. The torch was dead now, and Carasta had the flint. Would it be safer to try to find him, or call him back? She let her gaze travel around the outline of the door, and did neither. Both her lips slid in between her teeth.

If the torch was out, and the burning cloth extinguished, how could she even see the door and the darkness beyond?

She turned back and kicked at the clothes some more. The little chink of light grew until the whole little doorway showed. That was why Carasta had gone on to the other rooms, of course. Even with one eye, Carasta was no blinder than anybody else,

and he could see that the flickering illumination beyond the door meant trouble. The owners were not far away. They had just stashed the loot for future reference.

Polijn glanced back toward the small door, and then dropped to her knees among the clothing. What was out there?

She could see nothing through the opening but a blank wall. If she really wanted to know, she'd have to risk her head.

Sitting back on her haunches, she considered the tumbled clothes. There wasn't any sound from outside; it might be safe. She gathered up some of the bulkier garments. If she slid her head out among these things, and there was a guard, he might assume the stuff had just spilled out. If she decided to risk her entire body, she could use the clothes as camouflage even then, by dropping to the ground and acting like a bundle of rags. She'd done it before at home and it'd worked. Of course, her legs had been shorter in those days.

She shrugged. If it didn't work, well, singing for a troupe of bandits might not be worse than following Carasta hither and yon.

With a deep breath, she slithered forward. No one shouted or kicked at the pile of rags oozing from the opening, so she risked her shoulders, twisting

to the left when her pack caught on the doorway.

The light was cool and so was the cave it flooded. Featureless white walls surrounded Polijn, sitting in the middle of the thick, rich fabrics. She waited, motionless, letting her eyes adjust to the light, though there didn't seem to be any reason for it. There was nothing around her but massive pillars of grey and white. She turned her head slowly, but everything was alike neutral and uninteresting.

She was rising to her knees when she saw the door. She stared. It was hingeless, knobless. Clutching up her camouflage, she stepped slowly to it and ran a hand over it. Her fingers slid over cold metal. The door didn't move.

She saw no sign of a lock anywhere; it must have been hidden by some technique she didn't know. But why have such a door in a cave wall in the first place?

Stepping back, she looked up. This was no natural wall; it came to an end long before it reached the ceiling, ending in a squared roof. This had to be a building, but the walls were seamless, as though stone had been cast like iron.

If this was a building, then the other pillars must indicate other buildings. Turning, she found not only more doors but windows, too, all sealed shut. A

whole row of the unnaturally tidy buildings fronted on the street.

Polijn stared at the wall through which she had come, which was good, natural stone, and then looked at the row of buildings. This was no hidden place for a king in exile, like the ones in the songs. A whole city had been buried here. Why? What people had had to hide themselves this way? And where were they now? She couldn't even see any bones; the place seemed too old for bones. Time hung on it, but had not sunk in. All these buildings were as sharp and new as the day they'd been raised.

Where did the light come from? Polijn walked around a corner and found herself staring up another street. Rank upon rank of cold, silent buildings stretched out before her. She sank, clutching the thick garments around her. Polijn had been bred and born in the city; she knew all about cities. But she had never seen one so big, so dead.

"Cold."

Her head whipped around, ears straining at the sound.

"Too cold." It was a faint, petulant statement, made in a voice almost too far away to hear.

Polijn came to her feet and moved cautiously along the street to her left. The light

seemed brighter in that direction; maybe there was an exit there. If the voices were coming from that way, and if the voices turned out to be bandits, she'd be glad to see them. Anything to be free of this pale, cold corpse . . . no, skeleton of a city. It had been dead so long there wasn't even any grief left. Only near-perfect silence.

"Keep us here."

The light really was growing brighter, and the voices louder. Polijn arranged the borrowed clothing around her body, ready to make the transformation as soon as she reached the end of the corridor of dead buildings.

"It is really cold in here," said a voice with the eeriness gone from it as a bundle of clothing eased around a corner.

"If you don't quit complaining," replied another, "I'll warm you in a way you won't care for."

"Don't you touch me, you brute! I'll tell my father! This is all your fault! And I'll tell Eillo's husband whose face you have tattooed on your knee-caps!"

There was a slap and a shriek. Polijn unfolded from her bundle; the combatants were too preoccupied to pay much attention as she sneaked by.

In what would have been a town square, in a living city, stood a tall cage of entwined wooden staves, each as thick as

Polijn's torso. Two or three dozen naked captives stood in the center. Eight of these were involved in the tussle, a large, bearded man doing his best to haul a woman across his legs, the rest pulling toward or away from him, as suited their sympathies. Polijn recognized three of the nearest captives and also recognized, late, the clothes she was carrying. She eased her way toward the buildings on the far side of the square.

But all her camouflage simply made her the more conspicuous, a moving bundle of color in a still, silent city. "Look!" someone shouted.

"What's that?"

"It's . . . isn't that the little dancer!"

"I knew someone would come to our rescue!" cried Lady Ymile, pulling out of the grip of the burly bodyguard and rushing up to the bars. "Come here, girl! Oh, and, Erumegard, she's brought clothes!"

Polijn shrugged. If they kept screaming at her they might attract the sorcerer. She crossed to the cage. A long, thick arm (for it was obvious that Lady Ymile's thighs were matched by the rest of her person) reached out to snatch the first garment that came within reach.

"It's been cold, cold, cold!" complained the aristocratic captive. "And these idiots couldn't do a thing. Oh, I'll

make you chief minstrel in my husband's court for this! Oh dear, this isn't mine at all." She tossed a surcoat back into the crowd, where a dozen hands snatched at it. "Never mind, dear. You were likely in a hurry and couldn't pick out . . . ah, this will do."

Lady Ymile pulled a rich underdress on over her head. An arm reached past her toward Polijn; the lady slapped it away. "I am not done yet!" she snapped. "Oh, now this goes with my hair!"

"That's mine! It'll never fit you!"

"We'll see about that," said Ymile, with a toss of her head.

Polijn licked at a stray lock of hair brushing at her lips. "Er, the sorcerer, milady," she said. "Is he . . ."

"If you haven't seen him, he must not be here, dear," said Ymile, straining to tie a pair of leather laces that didn't stretch at all. "Ooh! This will never do. Stupid thing!" She tossed the offensive item into the crowd, aiming it at the corner farthest from the woman who had spoken. "I hope I never see him again. He just waved his hands and our clothes went flowing off along the floor like they'd dropped into a river. Then he searched us all personally with those scabby fingers." She tittered and reached for a man's jacket. "Mizlon probably en-

joyed that part. I don't know what he could have been looking for. Nothing I had."

"That's for sure," growled someone in the mob.

"Er, the door's over there," said a man behind Lady Ymile. "If we could . . ."

"I think so," Polijn agreed. She handed the rest of her burden into Lady Ymile's arms and ran around the corner of the cage to where the man was now standing.

The door, in contrast to the cage itself, was a solid block of wood, easily ten feet across. At dead center was an overlapping linked latch, too far away for any of the prisoners to have reached it through the bars, and having too many interlocking parts for a stick or string, if they'd had any, to do them much good.

Carasta would have argued price with them for their release. Polijn was neither so mercenary nor so shortsighted. There would be safety in a multitude. If Silnerli returned, this would surely be too many people to chase at once, and she might get away in the confusion.

Unlocking the door was simple from Polijn's side. She did not waste time looking over her shoulder; if Silnerli came in, he would see her, and that was that. She concentrated instead on the rigamarole of the lock,

knowing that her only camouflage now was the crowd inside the cage. Lift this part. Turn that knob. Raise the knob. Flip the latch to the side. Turn this. Lift that. There was actually no lock involved, simply a series of latches. People who used such doors either assumed that no one could reach them or that the amount of time they took to undo would guarantee that a guard would come upon the thief.

"There," she said, pulling the last latch free, "that's s . . ."

The big slab of wood slammed into her, sending her back a good three feet to topple onto hard stone. The naked captives burst from their cage, cheering for their freedom. Lady Ymile came last, slowly, her mind still intent on deciding between a green sash and a blue one.

Joy turned into confusion as the mob came to understand their situation. They milled around in the cold city square, and a few cast looks of regret back at their cage as they debated what to do now. "Where's my clothes?" "Find the swords!" "Which way is out?" "Is that the sorcerer coming back?" "What now?" "Where do we go?"

Hands smacked together. "People! People!" shouted Lady Ymile, having solved her personal dilemma by putting on both sashes. "Listen! Who better to lead us than . . ." She

glanced back at the cage.

Polijn stood up and rubbed a scraped place on her palm. "Polijn," she said.

"Than Polijn," cried Ymile, clapping her hands again and stamping one bare, pudgy foot on cold stone. "She has come this far, so I'm certain she can lead us out!"

"Three cheers for Polijn!" shouted someone in the crowd.

Polijn licked her lips. This crowd of nearly naked nobles and courtiers, who days before had not been loath to kick her out of the way, wanted her to act as a guide through the dead city. She shrugged, and put on her most confident smile.

"This way, good people!" she called, and started off in the direction of the brightest light. She could, she supposed, lead them back to the hole she'd come in by, but she doubted that the Lady Ymile could make it up that ramp.

Most of her followers were talking anyway, so silence would serve her little. Polijn struck up a little marching song that was popular in the north. They could sing along, and perhaps forget that, as they passed each block of stone cold structures, another block rose ahead of them and no one knew where they were going. This was not a blindly worshipful assembly, after all. It was still cold here, and she had brought no shoes,

facts which Lady Ymile had already mentioned.

"Maybe we should have gotten the clothes and shoes first, dear," said the woman, patting her shoulder for emphasis. Polijn smiled and nodded, and picked up speed a little.

"It wouldn't take much time, dear, and . . . oh!"

The pattern of shadows ahead of them was broken; only gray floor spread out beyond that last block of buildings. Polijn moved faster, but not as fast as some of her followers. Three men and four women were ahead of her when they came out of the city and hit open space.

A few simple souls lingered to raise another cheer for Polijn. Lady Ymile, though, and most of her court, picked up speed. Perhaps a hundred yards away across open floor there rose a high, sheer cliff. Rising at a diagonal across this was a staircase that led to a plateau from which the blue light streaked into the moribund city.

Polijn could have beaten them in the dash: half these people ran as if running was something new to them. But aside from her natural impulse to wonder what, exactly, was at the top of those stairs, Polijn could see from here that the stairs couldn't be more than one person wide. She hoped the groans of the fallen and dying wouldn't attract attention.



But frenzy was averted. Somewhere in the crowd of the noble and the nude was at least one soul distressed by the lack of discipline. "Parade order!" he bellowed, and though the order sounded ridiculously meek in this cavernous world, it struck up an echo in the running crowd. More orders and a moderate number of blows were necessary when they actually reached the stairs, but the mob was able to assemble and mount in single file, Lady Ymile gleefully studying her bare bodyguards from a few steps below them, passing her observations to some companion behind her.

Polijn wasn't sure where she came in parade order, so she tagged along at the rear. She kept her eyes on the cliffside and worried about what they'd find at the top. This kept her mind off the drop.

All they found, at first, reaching the plateau, was another group of the odd, square buildings. These, though, were no more than two stories high, and were not arranged in regular streets but in a maze-like assembly of alleys and cul-de-sacs. There was a way through; it led them past a long building that was easily recognizable as a barracks. This must have been some kind of guard post to protect the city below. Not pausing to catch her breath, Polijn moved

up past winded courtiers to join the main body of the mob. A guard post indicated a fear that someone might come in. And that argued a way out.

The plateau narrowed. Only one building was left to be passed, and surely that was honest sunlight beyond it. Polijn swung way to the right to look past the crowd. It was sunlight; the road stopped short at the mouth of the cave. Beyond that, everything was green. Bushes and tangled ivy shaded a swift little stream; trees and broken trunks gave evidence of an old forest. Except for one little path, hardly visible unless you looked at it straight from the right angle, it looked untouched and untrodden by anything human. Nature ran wild there, as if to compensate for the unnatural order below.

Polijn had never had much use for undiluted wilderness, without the chaser of civilization, but now she drank in the sight. She ran forward, nearly wetting her feet in the stream before she realized that she was alone.

She turned around and stared. The whole parade, which should have been rushing to its freedom, had turned aside to go into that last building, the sentry box just inside the tunnel that led back to the appalling city. It was the first building she'd

seen with its door open, but in Polijn curiosity had always taken second place to self-preservation.

She stopped and cast a longing look at the tangled green life in the open air. Then she turned around. Her instinct for survival was not mere instinct; it had been tempered by years of city life. Something had dragged all those refugees into a sinister building when freedom was within sight. Polijn wanted to run free, to get away from the city. But if such powerful magic was a trap set by Silnerli, who was to say it couldn't come after her?

Polijn stepped soundlessly back to the door and risked one eye. She shrugged. There was no magic there, beyond the effect of food and fire on those who had been kept, naked and unfed, in a cold cage for two days. Lady Ymile had laid claim to the only chair, at the only table, but the others ate no less enthusiastically for having to sit on the floor in the big room.

Neither as cold nor as hungry as the others, Polijn turned to go. It was time; somebody lived here, and she could think of only one likely inhabitant. Yet curiosity was not completely dead in her. She glanced toward the cave opening. Not much real sunlight penetrated the foliage there. So what had that

blue light been? It had continued to grow as they approached the sentry post.

She put her head inside the door to look around the room. There had to be some kind of window on the far side of the room, beyond the diners and . . .

The sharp intake of her breath was heard by one of Ymile's more alert bodyguards, who glanced up at her, and then turned to see what had startled her. He jumped to his feet and moved to the side of his commander, who also looked toward the window and then hurried to his mistress.

"My lady," he whispered, "we had better . . ."

Every head turned toward the door. "She's here, my lord, er, your majesty," came a voice from behind Polijn. "I can help you find her. Indeed, that's why . . ."

A sound of flesh on flesh cut off the sentence. "If she's within, I can find her myself!"

Polijn didn't hesitate. There was no way she could find a hiding place back among the buildings before the sorcerer saw her running. She dived into the dining crowd and ducked behind a few naked courtiers to the left of the door. If Silnerli was distracted by the crowd in his quarters long enough, perhaps she could slip out and lose

herself in the greenery beyond the cave entrance.

The captives quailed as their captor came to the doorway. Lady Ymile and the commander of her bodyguard seemed to be trying to hide behind each other. Nine courtiers were all squeezing under the heavy little table.

But Silnerli noticed none of this. He took two steps into the room and his head swung slowly to the left. Polijn remembered what he was looking for. She was sliding one hand into her tunic to touch the amulet when red-rimmed, red-veined eyes fastened on her.

"Ah!" said Silnerli. He stepped forward. Polijn put her hands on the floor to push herself up and away from him.

Lady Ymile, seeing this, slipped out from behind her bodyguard and edged toward the door. Silnerli did not see her and bore down on Polijn, who continued to back away.

Lady Ymile was gone. Three of her servants followed her, and then the rest filed away, understanding that the sorcerer had developed other interests. He paid no attention to them, and none made any move to change this.

Polijn had backed away as far as she cared to, with that thing in the window behind her. She stopped. So did Silnerli. He

gazed down at her from what seemed a height of twenty feet.

"You have the amulet," he said. It was not a question.

Polijn's hand dived into her tunic. She raised the golden bauble toward him.

"That does me no good," he informed her. "I will need your assistance to release the power."

Maybe she wasn't dead yet, after all. "I don't know how."

"I do," he assured her. He untied the belt of his robe to reveal a curiously-shaped knife hanging at his waist. "You need only cooperate. I will kill you quickly."

"Kill me," she sighed. So much for hope.

"The power will remain in the amulet as long as the recipient is alive," he said. "I will be swift, however, if you are reasonable." He seemed to shiver, and pulled his robes more tightly around him. So he had a reason for wearing those flashy, heavy things. Polijn suddenly felt less afraid, and Silnerli now seemed barely ten feet tall.

His nose rose, and the eyes rolled downward to consider her. "I know how to kill people very slowly," he remarked. "They could have told you this in Merofled."

Polijn shrugged. "What do you want me to do?"

"Turn around," said the sorcerer. She obeyed. "Approach

the globe."

Polijn sighed again and stepped toward the brilliant blue sphere in the window. She tried to keep her eyes on the city below, so as not to meet the dark eye sockets of the dull brown skull suspended in the center of the light.

But the skull was moving, and Polijn could not ignore it. She looked down and gasped to see the skull swarming with red. Another step forward, and these thick red shafts were covered with skin. It was the face of Silnerli. She turned back toward the sorcerer himself, to see if he'd noticed.

He had the knife out and held it before his chest. "That globe was my shelter from time," he said. "I could have lived as long as the city, but the globe itself grows old, and the power wanes. Every use of power weakens it further, and as it dies, I die. I must transfer the power from your amulet to the globe. You can see for yourself how mere proximity has reanimated the globe's strength."

That was true. Polijn had to raise a hand before her eyes to ward off the increasingly whiter and more brilliant light.

"I ruled this countryside as my own," said Silnerli. Both hands were raised above his shoulders. Polijn could see black and red splotches disfiguring

the skin. "No man, woman, or child dared question me. All were my servants, my playthings. They claimed the king as sovereign, but they knelt to me."

He wrinkled his hands into painful fists. Polijn saw blood oozing down his wrists. No sign of the pain showed in his frozen, furrowed cheeks.

She swallowed. "Did you build all this?" she asked.

"It was here already," he said. "As a young man, I found it, and the globe as well. It was the source of my strength, the base of my dreams. Once I had followers enough, I would raise it as my capital. All the north, perhaps all the continent, would be mine to rule."

He stared up at the ceiling. "And it will. I have found a source of power that will make me mightier than any king the north has known."

Well, that might be true, but Polijn wasn't quite ready to help him out yet. She was as good as dead already, so there was no reason not to try to escape. He had to kill her, after all, and despite his threats, it was obvious that he couldn't waste much time doing it. He didn't have much time left.

So Polijn bent her knees and launched herself up and through the window, her head barely missing the window frame, one

foot brushing against the globe.

"Fool!" roared Silnerli. "Did you think to escape me in my own city?"

Polijn glanced back only long enough to make sure he was not pausing to pick up any mystic instruments but was coming after her himself. Then she put her head down and sped into the tangle of buildings around the long barracks hall.

Silnerli flew overhead, catching up with her. "You will die," he informed her, "in seventeen installments."

Polijn found the alley she was looking for and gauged Silnerli's distance before she ran into it. There was the wall, just as she remembered it. She pounced over, and crouched in the shadow.

"I may leave some bits of you alive to exhibit to my subjects," the sorcerer said, passing overhead. The fringe of his robe swept against her hair as she jumped back over the wall.

Now she really put on speed, doing no more dodging or ducking to confuse the issue. Her target was the window of Silnerli's lair. She had nearly reached it when his roar informed her he had discovered her trick.

"Very clever! How clever can you be with your feet at opposite ends of the city?" The voice was not nearly far enough away for her liking.

Wincing only a little, Polijn lunged at the globe, which poured out dazzling light at the nearness of her talisman. It did not, however, move.

She couldn't hear what Silnerli was promising her, at the top of his lungs. Her only thoughts were for the nearness of the bellow, and the immobility of the globe. She hauled herself up through the window and gave the glowing sphere a push. One of her hands slid off and crashed into the stone of the frame. But the globe itself stayed firm in its socket.

Her plan had been to throw the globe down, to smash on the floor below. It was obvious, though, that only magic could move the sphere. She scratched at the sill with her nails.

"Ha!" roared Silnerli.

At the same moment, Polijn tore the amulet from her neck and hurled it at the globe. It was the only magic she had.

Light exploded through the room and Polijn fell back, her arms raised to keep fragments from hitting her face. A huge piece of debris rolled end over end above her head. Polijn shot under the table when she realized it was far too large to have come from the globe and could only have flown through the window.

Silnerli was upright, one hand clutching the door of the building. Flesh fell away from the

hand. Polijn's mouth opened as the sorcerer's face became the skull of the globe, but she made no sound. No more did Silnerli. He reeled backward, out of his domain.

Polijn, still on all fours, followed, avoiding the still glowing fragments of globe on the floor. Silnerli's clothes hung on him now, as shoulders and neck crumbled. He seemed to shrug. Then a foot caught in the hem of his robes and he stumbled, vanishing into the foliage.

Rising, Polijn ran to the door. The sorcerer had toppled into the stream. It rolled over him, soothing, smoothing, obliterating such of his features as remained. Then old bones crumbled and vanished, and the robes rolled and floated in the current.

A tree trunk, possibly fallen at random but more likely felled for Silnerli's convenience, crossed the stream. Polijn eased her way across, keeping an eye on the sorcerer's robes because one couldn't know, for certain, when a sorcerer truly died. Once across, she glanced back at the cave mouth, and couldn't see it for the greenery. She had turned around to take her bearings when she heard the voices.

"Ah, that'll be it, then. I told you I put them in a safe place."

Polijn followed the sound of the replies through the forest and found what she had ex-

pected. Carasta stood supervising the excavation of the missing clothes, three or four bodyguards bringing up rich fabrics as he stood and nodded approval. Lady Ymile was pointing out those garments which were hers to try on first.

The company was not fascinated by fashion to the exclusion of all other considerations. Several sentries who had been posted detected Polijn's approach and shouted to the others.

Carasta, poised to run, glanced backward, and then came through the crowd. "You got away!" he exclaimed. That one eye flicked to look over her head. "Didn't you?"

"Yes, I . . . I did," said Polijn. "He's, er, looking for me in the city."

"Ah," said the minstrel, looking behind her again. "This'll all make up into quite a story, I am sure. You just gimme all the details later and I'll arrange 'em. He might still think of coming this way, though."

He spun around and clasped his hands for attention. "We'd best be gathering up what we have and moving on, my good lords. It is best never to count on a sorcerer's stupidity."

Several laughed, but others started to grab up whatever garment was handy and toss it over themselves.

Carasta watched them and

nodded. "Who'd pay more for 'em, do you think?" he said, out of one corner of his mouth to Polijn. "The count'd give us a nice reward, sure, but so would the duke. And he'd pay, too, for a song about how the naked bride . . . ow!"

A rock had nicked him in the ear. "What'd you do that for?" a sentry asked the woman who had thrown it.

She told him. By that time Carasta was ten yards away and adding to it. Polijn threw herself into the grass as the outraged wedding party started after its would-be betrayer. She watched them carefully until

they had disappeared into the forest, all running for the northwest.

Then she picked herself up and turned her face south. If she could move fast enough, she might well escape the protection of both Carasta and the Lady Ymile. She had killed a sorcerer already today; how much protection did she need?

Stooping, she plucked a silver brooch out of the grass. She tossed it into the air, caught it, and shoved it inside her tunic. Count Hemlish's lands lay somewhere to the south. Maybe he'd pay for a song about the death of Silnerli.

---

*(continued from page 7)*

one has much time to spare for mere sightseeing!), but apparently Malice is committed to the D.C. area and Omaha is the home of Chuck Leavitt, the organizer of the Midwest convention. To tell the truth, though, if you come in for the weekend, you'll probably find yourself rating the city from the view you get of the convention hotel anyway. The complimentary T-shirt at Omaha sports a super logo; but then, I'm also quite fond of the Malice Domestic teapot.

I must choose my favorite of the three, you say? I say nay. I say that all three conventions offer crime fiction aficionados

a weekend to savor, one to look back on with much pleasure. Mystery reading is a solitary occupation, of course. But the attendance at these three gatherings indicates that readers welcome the opportunity to eat, drink, and sleep their favorite novels with folks of like mind. At least, for a weekend.

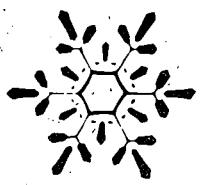
And then the beat goes on, doesn't it? Because we all go home and pick up the books we haven't yet read, many of them penned by authors who've just come to our attention as a result of the convention. It sure beats the slide show one usually has to remember vacations by.

And now for London . . .





# Give a gift of **ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**



Why give knick-knacks for Christmas when for a stocking stuffer of a price, you can give your friends spine-tingling mystery, suspense and intrigue. Delivered throughout the coming year in the pages of **Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine**.

Once-a-year holiday rates are now in effect. The first subscription to **Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine** costs only \$20.97 for 15 issues. Each additional subscription costs even less—just \$16.97 for 15 issues.

And you can complete your **Alfred Hitchcock** gift giving in a matter of minutes. Just fill out the form below or if you prefer, call us with your order **toll free: 1-800-333-3311**

Gift subscriptions received by December 1st will start at the holiday season. Orders that arrive subsequently will begin with the current issue. Greeting cards will be sent to announce your gift.

**Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine** is also available at these holiday rates. The first subscription costs only \$20.97 for 15 issues, each additional subscription is only \$16.97 for 15 issues.



**Mail To:**  
**Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine**  
**P.O. Box 7055**  
**Red Oak, Iowa 51591**



☐ Payment Enclosed  
check desired title(s)  
Alfred Hitchcock ☐ Ellery Queen ☐

☐ Bill me after January 1.

**Gift For:**

**Bill To:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Sign Gift Card \_\_\_\_\_

YPSH-8

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# The Mother of the Detective

by G. D. H. and M. Cole



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

LICENSED TO 142Z.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**I**t cannot be pleasant for an eminent private detective to be the victim of an unsolved mystery in his own home; it must be as humiliating as for a Harley Street specialist to suffer from an unexplained catarrh. So it is not altogether surprising that when Mrs. Warrender, after a very pleasant weekend spent in the company of an old friend of her girlhood, alighted one Monday morning at the garden gate of her house she kept for her son James, she should find the aforesaid son in what can be described as a fit of the sulks.

James Warrender was a very well-known detective indeed. He was in very close relationship with some of the highest officials at Scotland Yard, who had often admitted that his imagination was as useful, at times, as their elaborate and complete organization. But at the moment he did not look at all eminent or imaginative; to his mother's practiced eyes, in fact, he bore the appearance of a man whose best dress shirt has been irretrievably torn by the Perfect Sanitary Steam Laundry or one of its kin, and it was under this apprehension that she first addressed him.

"Nonsense! Nothing of the sort!" said the irate public man, whose nerves had been traditionally frayed by the visits of several bright young pressmen, anxious to provide him with a quite unwanted advertisement. "The silver's been stolen!"

"What? The silver stolen? I knew it!" said his mother, causing her son to start and look up with a suspicious glance. "No, James, don't be silly. Of course I didn't steal it. Why should I want to steal it, when it will all belong to me if you die suddenly—not that I want you to die, of course, dear—I should be very sorry indeed . . . I only meant that something always does happen when I go away. You remember that time when I only went to a garden party—Mrs. Hughes's, I believe it was—and you let that man sell you a cat he said was a tom, and it had kittens almost at once . . . Yes, dear, of course it's very annoying. But you'll get it all back, won't you? You surely know all about thieves and who they are, and that nice inspector—the one who doesn't take milk in his tea, or else he does, but I can never remember—he'll arrest them for you."

"But I don't!" the exasperated detective cut in at last. "There's no way I can track him! Not a single trace. The pantry window was forced; so was the door of the silver cupboard; but there isn't a single footprint or fingerprint about. He simply walked in and walked out, as cool as a cucumber!"

*From Mrs. Warrender's Profession, copyright 1939 by G. D. H. and M. Cole. Reprinted by permission of Watkins, Loomis Agency, Inc., and David Higham Associates, Ltd.*

"Through the *pantry window*," Mrs. Warrender interrupted. "James, dear, he couldn't. Not carrying all those spoons and forks and things. It's quite a jump from the window. He'd be certain to drop some of them."

"I didn't say he went out through the pantry," Warrender snapped. "He didn't. He walked out through the hall door, just as cool as—as a cucumber!" he finished, with a certain lack of effect. "And if that maid of yours—Gladys—hadn't been God's own fool, we'd have caught him!"

"Gladys? But—never mind, dear," seeing that he was on the verge of apoplexy. "Tell me all about it. What did Gladys do?"

"She didn't do anything! At least," Warrender said, "what happened was this. Gladys heard a noise in the night, and instead of calling me, she crept to the head of the stairs to see what it was. Then she saw a shadow moving, which looked like a man in the hall. And he must have heard her, because at once he sprang to the hall door, and let himself out. And she, the idiot! instead of coming and waking me she must needs creep down to the front door and shriek. By the time she'd got there the man was through the gate and out of sight, but all she could do was to go on shrieking. I heard a row, and came down, and there she was, yelling Blue Murder on the front doorstep, and half the neighbors were awake and wanting to know what the devil we were making such a row about on a Sunday morning. But there was not a sign of the chap, of course."

"But, dear," said his mother mildly, "if he was running away so fast with a great load of silver, surely somebody must have seen him?"

"Well, they didn't. You know what a nice quiet sabbath-keeping suburb we are! They were all in bed and asleep. And the constable was up the other end of the main road, so *he* didn't see. There wasn't anybody about at all. It's too bad!" finished James fiercely.

"Yes, dear. I wonder if Gladys has been having a toothache, poor girl. I think I'll just trot along and see. They're so careless about not going to the dentist when they ought to, but I suppose one can't blame them, they've never been taught that a little pain at once saves such a lot later—"

"It isn't her teeth, it's her brains that are wrong. I wish you would get servants with a little more intelligence."

"I do try to, dear; but it isn't very easy, you know. And I don't think one really wants servants to be *too* clever, does one? They

get such curious ideas," said Mrs. Warrender. "I think I'll just ask Gladys now, if you wouldn't mind taking up my bag, dear. There's no time like the present. And then if you don't want me, I must have a look at the garden. I'm sure you've none of you had time to do anything to it, and I've been worrying about those autumn sunflowers all the weekend. They look so dreadful if they aren't cut regularly." There was the sound of a knock.

"That'll be Hennessy," said James gloomily. Hennessy was the inspector.

"Oh, how nice! Be sure you let me give him a glass of sherry when you've finished your talk, dear. It's such a nice habit. I'll just run along and be out of your way, as soon as I've got my old pinafore on. Now, where are my gardening gloves?" She softly fussed her way out of the room, just before a warm police inspector, obviously worried by the publicity which failure to find Mr. Warrender's burglar would bring to his department, was ushered in.

"Mother! Mother! Where are you? The inspector is just going!"

"Here, dear!" a faint voice came from the bottom of the garden. "There's just something here I can't quite manage to reach."

The inspector hurried politely down the path, followed by Warrender, to find the little old lady standing in the corner of the garden by the wall, gazing plaintively at something caught in the branches of a tree.

"Oh, how kind of you, Mr. Hennessy! How do you do? It's just—I can't quite reach this . . . If you wouldn't mind . . ." The inspector made a long arm and brought down the little parcel. Then his jaw dropped and he gave a gasp, for what it contained was a number of Georgian silver forks wrapped in green baize and tissue paper.

"What the—I beg your pardon, ma'am. But—are these yours?"

"Why, yes. Aren't they, James?"

"But Mr. Warrender was telling me the thief got away by the front door!"

"Oh, yes, but of course he didn't. I was quite sure he didn't. He went this way. And I told you he'd never be able to climb without dropping some of the things, didn't I, James? But wasn't it fortunate they caught in the tree, like this?" She looked round with a smile.

"But . . . but . . ." Warrender seemed "struck all of a heap," and none too pleased. He tried sarcasm. "If you know all about this, Mother, perhaps you won't mind telling Hennessy the name of the thief."

"I'm afraid I don't know his name," Mrs. Warrender said, regretfully. "But I'm sure Inspector Hennessy can find out who Gladys's young man is, if he asks people round about here."

"Gladys's young man!"

"Well, it mayn't be her young man, of course, but I don't think she's got any brothers or anything like that in the neighborhood. Of course, she might have more than one young man; some girls are really dreadful in that way. But you could find out, couldn't you, inspector?"

"Mother! Will you kindly explain? What do you mean about Gladys? And how do you know?"

"Why," said the old lady, "I guessed, as soon as you told me about it."

"Why?"

"Why, it was so absurd about Gladys. You see, James, you know a great deal about criminals and how they behave, what you call psychology, but it's all about people you don't know at all, really. I'm sure you don't know anything about me—" and indeed the eminent criminologist did not look as though he did "—and of course you'd never dream of knowing anything about anybody like Gladys. But you see, I know Gladys, and she's a very quick girl when anything happens, not a bit likely to have a fit when she saw a burglar or scream instead of calling you. So when you told me, I thought, why on earth was Gladys screaming at the front door? And, of course, the easiest answer was, to let somebody get away by the back door, and have you all running the wrong way. Then she'd have plenty of time to cover up the tracks or anything, if he made them, before you ever thought of looking in the garden. And, besides, there was her waking up."

"Why on earth shouldn't she wake up?"

"There, you see! If you knew about Gladys, you wouldn't ask. Nothing will ever wake her, either in the morning or any other time. Why, James, you know I have to wait up for you, if you're going to be late, because Gladys never heard, even when we put a bell in her bedroom. Of course, she *might* have had a toothache or something like that, that kept her awake, so I asked her if she wanted something for it. But she hadn't got the sense to make up a lie and say she had—of course I didn't tell her why I wanted to know, but she might have guessed. But she isn't really very intelligent, as you said, James; though I think it's rather a good thing when servants aren't. Don't you, Mr. Hennessy?" She addressed

the inspector, who was still standing lost in surprise.

"Well, but . . . you mean she told him where the stuff was, and helped him pinch it?"

"And lent him my gardening gloves." Mrs. Warrender nodded vigorously.

"At least, they weren't in the proper place, and I'm sure nobody's been gardening while I've been away. Don't you say criminals always forget some little thing, James, like that?"

"Well, if that's so, and anyway it looks pretty much as if your maid's lying, sir," said the inspector, "I'd better be getting on with the job. I'd best have a word with her first."

"Oh, you let James bully Gladys, Mr. Hennessy." Mrs. Warrender smiled at him. "I'm sure he'll get the truth out of her. James can be really terrible when he likes; I should be afraid of him myself, if I wasn't his mother. And then you could go and look for Gladys's young man."

"I wish you could tell me who he is, ma'am," the inspector said.

"I'm so sorry I can't. But, you see, I make a point of never interfering with my servants' private affairs. I don't think it's right."

"Not even," James inquired with heavy sarcasm, "if their young men are criminals?"

"Certainly not!" said Mrs. Warrender. "I'm sure if you were engaged to a girl who was a thief, James, you wouldn't want people asking questions about it!" Both men gasped.

"But," Inspector Hennessy protested faintly, "that seems a bit overconfident, ma'am, if I may say so. When you get your house burgled through it."

"Oh, but it wouldn't have been burgled if I'd been at home, you see."

"May one ask why not?" James inquired.

"Because I should have woken, of course; and I should have looked out the back window. Gladys isn't so stupid as not to know that. But men always sleep heavily in their own homes, and wake up all in a muddle. Won't you have a glass of sherry before you go, Mr. Hennessy?" said Mrs. Warrender.



# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Carol Harper



Illustration by Patricia Olstad

**P**latinum Blues by award-winning Canadian author William Deverell (British American Publishing, \$18.45) takes an engaging lawyer, Oliver Gulliver, who also happens to be mayor of a one-horse logging town in northern California, from his sleepy practice to the high-pressure world of rock and roll recording in Los Angeles. Oliver's daughter is in love with C. C. Gilley, an alcoholic former star who is attempting a comeback. Oliver does not approve, although he discovers that he likes Gilley, and when Gilley's love-song tribute to his daughter is pirated, Oliver agrees to act for him in a plagiarism suit. Oliver's big case becomes even more important, since his practice, financial well-being, and general life-style are being ruined by his ne'er-do-well brother-in-law and a new lawyer in town. When people start to die because of the suit, he realizes that he may be in over his head, but he perseveres and finds that he has more of the right stuff than he thought.

**Fade the Heat** is the latest by Jay Brandon (Pocket, \$18.95) and is quite different from his earlier *Predator's Waltz*. *Fade the Heat* stars a district attorney with an excellent reputation and not a few enemies. It is set in San Antonio, Texas, and revolves around the arrest of the D.A.'s son for rape. At first, the arrest, and presumed frame-up appear to be blackmail—the D.A. is asked to have all the charges against a particularly vile criminal dropped in exchange for evidence that will clear his son. But the story becomes instead an investigation into the D.A.'s inner self and the lengths to which he will go to "rescue" his child. This book simply oozes legal atmosphere, but the characterization of the D.A. is so well

done that the reader doesn't notice he's been instructed on the function of a county prosecution office in central Texas until after it's over.

David Lindsey introduces a new police officer in **Mercy** (Doubleday, \$19.95). Detective Carmen Palma, Houston P.D., is called in to investigate a particularly gruesome murder in one of the more exclusive parts of Houston. The murder is clearly the doing of a serial killer. She uses all her resources to investigate it, including the wisdom of her mother, who still lives in Houston's Hispanic "ghetto," and finds along the way that she is one of those officers with a facility for getting inside the head of a sexually-motivated killer. Even though Carmen is in the Houston police department, and in the homicide division, she does not encounter Detective Stuart Haydon, Lindsey's other cop. Perhaps this is an alternate cast which will never feature Haydon. But like Lindsey's other books, *Mercy* is as much about the police officer, her background, and the city of Houston as it is about the murders.

David Cooper Wall has written a first novel, **One Cried Murder** (Dember Books, \$16.95), about the death of an actor who was starring in a hit off-Broadway production of *Macbeth*. The actor's lover Samantha, married to an older, wealthy man, is using her husband's money to finance the actor's play. Suspects include the wealthy husband, a sleazy hanger-on who is blackmailing the husband, the theater owner, a rich businessman, and the unlikeable Samantha herself. David Hamilton is a private investigator for the husband's attorney, a friend of the officer in the charge of the case, and an interested bystander. As bodies begin to pile up, Ham finds himself in jeopardy. The author's background in the theater helps make this mystery nicely atmospheric.

**The Star of Sutherland** is a diamond—a large, uncut diamond that a dying alcoholic told English professor Jim Harrington about as he lay in a trash heap behind a college hangout. Harrington finds the diamond and takes it to his old geology instructor for verification, only to find that whoever killed the alcoholic is now after him. Is it the college president, the jeweler, or the geologist, all of whom Harrington knew in the past, when he attended the college himself? Gene Breaznell's book (Walker, \$18.95) is another intriguing first novel, by an author who knows well the South Carolina piedmont he uses as a setting.

**Devil in a Blue Dress** by Walter Mosley (Norton, \$18.95) is a fascinating study of how Easy Rawlins, a black man, recently laid off from a defense plant in post-World War II Los Angeles, becomes

a private investigator. He is asked by a notorious gangster to find a sexy blonde singer known to frequent black nightclubs and jazz joints. Easy isn't comfortable with this assignment, but he needs money for the mortgage. As he gets into the role of investigator, he finds that it suits him, even though he also finds that all is not as it should be (or as he would have it be) in 1940's L.A. Easy Rawlins is promised a second case—both in the dustcover notes and in the closing pages when he tells a friend that his new job is “private investigations . . . [for] people I know and people they know.” I look forward to it.

Yet another first novel—this by Katherine Hall Page—chronicles the discovery of the body of a particularly vile teenager in the belfry on the town green. The discoverer, Faith Sibley, is the minister's new wife and a stranger in town, but even she has felt the impact that Cindy Shepherd had on the residents of this small New England village. **The Body in the Belfry** (St. Martin's, \$16.95) follows Faith as she meddles in village affairs, partly from ignorance and innocence, partly from boredom, and partly from the feeling that even Cindy didn't deserve to be murdered. When more murders occur and Faith herself is threatened, the police and her husband convince her to stay out of things, but it is too late. The murderer now fears Faith and is after her. Good suspense along with a cosy tale of murder, New England style.

Randy Wayne White's **Sanibel Flats** (St. Martin's, \$17.95) introduces “Doc” Ford, ex-intelligence and current biological supply specialist who works off the docks on Florida's Sanibel Island. *Sanibel Flats* brings to mind what might have happened if John Steinbeck's “Doc” (the real-life Ed Ricketts) had taken to detecting along with his scientific collecting. Except, of course, that Steinbeck's Doc would not have had as a lover the wife of a soon-to-be-deposed dictator of a Central American country or a close friend in a contra-like group in that same country. Nor would Steinbeck's Doc be interested in tracing the history of an ancient Mayan text. Part thriller, part mystery, *Sanibel Flats* has a lot of local color thrown in by White, who is a fishing guide in the Sanibel Island area.

Jack Lynch is a public relations officer for a bank in New Orleans, but he does more than press releases in **Murphy's Fault** by Steven Womack (St. Martin's, \$17.95). As the bank owner's troubleshooter, he is asked to dig up dirt on the old man's enemies, and the time comes when the enemies include Jack's former father-in-law and best friend. This first novel puts a likeable character in a difficult situation, set against a steamy New Orleans background.

How he works out his conflicts is as interesting as his travels through the projects and the Garden District and his brief sojourns with sleazy politicians and profiteering developers.

**Let Sleeping Afghans Lie** by Michael Thall (Walker, \$18.95), starts with a fascinating and hilarious scene—toy designer George Spinoza wakes after a particularly raucous party to find that his ex-wife Irene has crocheted the hair of his pet Afghan hound to the fringe of his prized Afghan rug. This practical “joke,” masterminded by his old friend Biswanger, seems insufficient alibi, however, to keep Irene from being charged with the murder of Miles Dixon, one of the guests at that party. Since George and Irene are somewhat amicable, he feels obliged to investigate and clear her good name. But he finds that drugs, money laundering, the Afghan resistance, and the State Department make investigation harder than it first appeared.

Anna Ashwood Collins introduces us to efficiency expert Abigail Doyle in **Deadly Resolutions** (Walker, \$18.95). Abigail is part of a walkers’ club who, on their annual New Year’s day walk, discover a body in a seaside bunker. She teams up with police detective Margaret Standish to determine who killed the general from the Army Corps of Engineers. Something of an environmentalist’s mystery, the “nefarious” doings of the corps appear to be the motive.

Private Eye Gil Disbro, who usually does skip-traces for a bail-bondsman, is asked to investigate the disappearance of a child from his father’s home near Cleveland. Suspects include the grandparents, fundamentalists who have hired a “deprogrammer” to kidnap the child and deliver him into their care. But as Disbro investigates, he finds that murder, conspiracy, and twisted motives complicate things. **The Flip Side of Life** by James E. Martin (Putnam, \$21.95) is a good P.I. tale with a midwestern setting and interesting characterization; it has a plot with a twist that keeps you guessing until the very end.

**A Cry in the City** by Pauline Glen Winslow (St. Martin’s, \$16.95) uses the murder of two children to illustrate the fragile psyche of the mother. Mary Christopher, recently widowed, is now the prime suspect in the murder of her children. Mary, deep in grief, has appeared to lose all sense of self-preservation, so her neighbors in her apartment building in New York City take her under their wings, protecting her and recruiting a policeman to investigate for her. As policeman Danny Valenti follows up on this case, he finds himself being attracted to Mary, thereby adding a bit of romance to a tale of murder.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



**H**itchcock took viewers to new heights of suspense with his 1958 thriller *Vertigo*. He terrified them with inexplicable avian attacks in *The Birds*. Now get ready for **Arachnophobia**, a comic thriller about a quiet California town invaded by killer spiders. If a grab-onto-your-date, squirm-in-your-seat thriller can be delightful, this one is.

In his directorial debut, longtime Steven Spielberg colleague Frank Marshall picks up where Hitchcock left off. He keeps the story line creeping along at a tension-building pace, but punctuates it with comic relief.

The film opens with a scientific spider-hunting expedition in the remote and beautiful rain forests and mountains of Venezuela and jumps to a bucolic California town where Norman Rockwell would feel

right at home. But lurking beneath the town's calm, pastoral facade is the threat posed by a killer tarantula the size of a softball. The arachnid hitched a ride to the West Coast from Venezuela. His vehicle: the coffin of his last rain forest victim, who just happened to be a photographer from this quiet burg.

The spider isn't the town's only newcomer: Dr. Ross Jennings (Jeff Daniels) and his high-powered stockbroker wife (Harley Jane Kozak) are fed up with the pressures of big city life. So, with their two adorable children, this picture-perfect family flees San Francisco for their dream house and dream life in Canaima—a town the filmmakers named for Venezuela's Canaima National Park, where the breathtaking opening scenes were shot.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Hitchcock's *Vertigo* was set in San Francisco and its environs.



# Give a gift of **ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

Why give knick-knacks for Christmas when for a stocking stuffer of a price, you can give your friends spine-tingling mystery, suspense and intrigue. Delivered throughout the coming year in the pages of **Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine**.

Once-a-year holiday rates are now in effect. The first subscription to **Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine** costs only \$20.97 for 15 issues. Each additional subscription costs even less—just \$16.97 for 15 issues.

And you can complete your **Ellery Queen** gift giving in a matter of minutes. Just fill out the form below or if you prefer, call us with your order **toll free: 1-800-333-3053**

Gift subscriptions received by December 1st will start at the holiday season. Orders that arrive subsequently will begin with the current issue. Greeting cards will be sent to announce your gift.

**Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine** is also available at these holiday rates. The first subscription costs only \$20.97 for 15 issues, each additional subscription is only \$16.97 for 15 issues.



**Mail To:**  
**Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine**  
**P.O. Box 7052**  
**Red Oak, Iowa 51591**

☐ Payment Enclosed  
check desired title(s)  
Ellery Queen ☐ Alfred Hitchcock ☐

**Gift For:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Sign Gift Card \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Bill me after January 1.

**Bill To:**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

YPSM-7

*The Birds* took place in the sleepy seaside town of Bodega Bay, north of San Francisco.

The Jenningses get off on the wrong foot when the town's elderly physician (Henry Jones) reneges on his promise to retire and turn the practice over to the newcomer doctor. The dream quickly becomes a nightmare when the few patients the young doctor does manage to attract wind up dying, a turn of events that earns him the unfortunate nickname Dr. Death.

Of course there can be no arachnophobia without someone's being deathly afraid of arachnids. And, of course, good Dr. Jennings is the one. It seems an early childhood encounter with a curious spider made him momentarily paralyzed with fear.

The two-legged cast of *Arachnophobia* is first-rate. Leading man Jeff Daniels is more everyman than leading man. He manages at times to look like a bewildered, scared child; at other times he's a mature, responsible doctor. And it can't have been easy working with the dozens of real, creepy-crawly spiders he confronts in the film.

As the self-billed rock 'n' roll exterminator, John Goodman gives the film much of its comedy. Mimicking a gunslinger from the old West, Goodman

goes after the rapidly multiplying pests with an especially powerful insecticide he dubs his "private stock."

Harley Jane Kozak, as the doctor's wife Molly, is perky in her supporting role.

What separates *Arachnophobia* from the typical blood-and-gore horror films of today is its subtlety. For the most part, the moviegoer isn't pounded over the head with horrific battles between the eight-legged and the two-legged. At one point, when everything is building up to a spider bite, for example, something occurs at the last moment to prevent it and the scene fades out. The audience lets out a collective sigh of relief. Time and time again Marshall uses this technique of raising expectations and then dashing them.

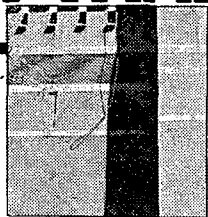
Director Marshall, like Hitchcock, gives us unusual camera angles. At times we get a spider's-eye view of things. He also uses shadows, reflections, and other less than straightforward methods to keep suspense alive.

Finally, kudos to the dozens of spiders, large and small, who lurked when they had to lurk, lingered when they needed to linger, and lunged when it was called for.



# THE STORY THAT WON

The July Mysterious Photo-Streilein of Johnstown, Penn- go to Art Cosing of Fairfax, Audubon, Pennsylvania; Jean fornia; Elliot Roark of Wa- Paul, Minnesota; Perry E. and Alfred W. Cross of Sacramento, California.



graph contest was won by Jan sylvania. Honorable mentions Virginia; Richard E. Bailey of Stately of Hollywood, Cali- tauga, Texas; Paul Buys of St. Pariseau of Owosso, Michigan;

Photo by Brian N. Cox

## CRIMINOLOGY: 202 by Jan Streilein

"Okay, class. You've had ten minutes to study the picture, make your observations, and consider its meaning. Now let's check your deductive reasoning."

"Parker, what's your conclusion?"

"Well, judging from the height of the stone wall and the long, narrow windows, it seems obvious that we're looking at a prison. There's probably a catwalk around the upper inside perimeter for guards to patrol and keep watch on the yard. One or more convicts must have gotten up there, tied a rope to the outside beam, and got caught before anyone could climb down."

"Aveni?"

"I agree with everything except the rope. It doesn't reach even one-third of the way to the ground. It wasn't to be used to escape, it was for a suicide attempt. They're real careful that there aren't any places in the cells for inmates to hang themselves."

"What do you see, Schultz?"

"I think it's a code for someone on the outside. The prisoner was afraid his mail would be censored or that his visitor sessions might be recorded, so he decided to send a message for help."

"Very good. Please share your findings with the class."

"First of all, that's not a rope, it's a steel cable. Second, that's not a noose, it's a slipknot. Lastly, it hangs mostly in the dark, recessed section of the building. Mr. X wants his confederate to wire his attorney that he's found a *loophole* involving the jury's uncertainty about his guilt beyond a *shadow* of a doubt."

# CLASSIFIED

# MARKET

APRIL-DECEMBER/90

ALFRED HITCHCOCK—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.60 per word—payable in advance—(\$39.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

## ADDITIONAL INCOME

GET PAID FOR READING BOOKS! \$50-\$100 per book. Write: Calco Publishing (Dept. C-50), 500 South Broad, Meriden, CT 06450.

## AUTHOR'S SERVICE

LOOKING for a publisher? Learn how you can have your book published, promoted, distributed. Send for free booklet. HP-5, Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

## AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS IT TRUE...Jeeps for \$44 through the Government? Call for facts! 1-708-742-1142.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

VINTAGE Mysteries—Free Catalogue! Good, Inexpensive, Recycled Detective Fiction. Grave Matters, Box 32192-B, Cincinnati, Ohio 45232.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD. PAY: Get "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$5.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send \$3.75 (includes postage) to Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. All subjects invited. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SML, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

## Bargain Books

Publishers' overstocks, remainders, imports—over 3,000 titles at up to 80% savings in our **FREE CATALOG!** Biography, History, Art, Nature, Gardening, Cooking, Fiction—something for everyone, including about 600 new titles monthly. Write:

**Hamilton** Box 15-715, Falls Village CT 06031

MANUSCRIPTS wanted, all types. Publisher with 70-year tradition. Free examination, "Guide to Publication." 1-800-695-9599.

DISCOUNT MYSTERY/CRIME/SUSPENSE BOOKS! Brand New! Save 70%. Catalog \$3 - refundable, to: Martin Taragano, 31 Dubois Road, New Paltz, NY 12561.

SUPERLEARNING! Triple learning speed through music! Develop Super-memory; Control stress; Tap potentials. Free book excerpt & catalogue (Distributors Wanted). Super-learning, 450-Z10, Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10123.

FIVE MINUTE MYSTERIES. 37 solve-it yourself mysteries, as excerpted in Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine. Send \$5.95 plus \$1.50 p/h to: Running Press, Dept. EQAH, 125 South 22nd St., Phila., PA 19103.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing Mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start immediately! Enclose stamped envelope! Foodmaster-MDC, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-9983.

VENDING MACHINES. No Selling. Routes earn amazing profits. 32-page Catalogue FREE. Parkway Corporation, 1930NO Greenspring Drive, Timonium, Maryland 21093.

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

# PLACE

# CLASSIFIED

AH-DECEMBER/90

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

**BUMPERSTICKER PRINTER.** Cheap, Simple, Portable. Free Details. Bumper, POB 22791(TW), Tampa, FL 33622.

**WORK FOUR MONTHS! Loaf Eight! Proven Method.** Rush \$4.50 to: SCD Limited, P.O. Box 11955, Dept. H, Albuquerque, NM 87192.

**READ Books for pay!** Call 1-900-847-7878 (\$0.99/min) or Write: Pase - RD9, 161 Lincolnway, North Aurora, IL 60542.

**INVESTIGATORS** needed. Help return money to people and earn a commission. For more information send \$1.00, ad, and SASE to: Lonnie Russell, 4021 Eastridge, Snyder, Texas 79549.

**MAILORDER OPPORTUNITY:** Start profitable home business without experience or capital. Information free. Mail Order Associates, Dept. 684, Montvale, NJ 07645.

**THE Possible Dream:** Start one of the 7 most profitable home based businesses with little capital, part-time. Guaranteed. Free information, send stamp to REBA Publishing, 1865 Country Manor Lane, Rock Hill, SC 29730.

## BUY IT WHOLESALE

**400,000 BARGAINS** Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations . . . Closeouts . . . Job Lots . . . Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49424.

**EARN MONEY** selling rings, jewelry, buckles, watches—buy direct. 130% below retail. Catalog \$1.00 (refundable): Anka-N, 90 Greenwich Ave., Warwick, RI 02886.

**CLOSEOUTS! Discounts! Below wholesale! Liquidations! Freebies! All kinds! Information (Stamp):** DDN, 20152-D, Ferndale, Michigan 48220.

**SILK Plants, Trees, Flowers Wholesale.** 60% Savings. B/W Catalog \$2.00; Color \$10.00. Silks-Inc., 15125 Hayden, Scottsdale, AZ 85260.

## COMPUTERS & SOFTWARE

**THE GAME'S AFOOT!** Computer Games for the Armchair Detective. Murders in country houses, mean streets and exotic settings await your solution! Please send SASE to: Pikes Peak Adventures, Inc., 100 East Kelley Rd., Woodland Park, CO 80863.

**WRITER'S BLOCKBUSTER® SOFTWARE.** "This New and Easy Plot Builder Eliminates Writer's Block For You!" **RANDOMLY SELECTS AND MERGES 100's OF:** • Places/Settings • Characters/Names • Plots/Situations/Obstacles • Climaxes/Surprise Twists. \$29.99 + \$1.50 S/H. 1-800-221-9280, ext. 958. V/MC. P.O. BOX 27202, TEMPE, AZ 85285. Requirement: IBM Compatible: w/ 256K.

## EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

**HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME,** diploma awarded. Low tuition. Our 92nd year. Phone free anytime. 1-800-228-5600, or write American School, Dept. #388, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

**WITCHCRAFT** Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28563.

**BASIC Tune-up Instructions.** You can do it! Send: Make, Model, Year, \$5/SASE. Tune-up, P.O. Box 5802, Glendale, AZ 85312-5802.

## FINANCIAL

**BORROW** By Mail. No cosigners. Describe need To: Financial, Box 165, Palmer, MA 01069 or call 413-283-6379.

**MONEY AVAILABLE!** 1st And 2nd Mortgages, Business And Personal Loans, Credit Cards, Grants. Regardless of Past Credit History. 717-531-1025, Ext. 138.

## FOR INVENTORS

**INVENTORS!** Can you patent and profit from your idea? Call AMERICAN INVENTORS CORPORATION for free information. Over a decade of service. 1-800-338-5656. In Canada call (413) 568-3753.

# Classified Continued

AH-DECEMBER/90

## FOR SALE-MISCELLANEOUS

CHRISTMAS Trees Wholesale! Pine & Spruce. Logue Evergreen Farms, Sligo, Penna: 16255. Phone 814-745-2401.

## HELP WANTED

MAKING BABY BIBS FOR \$\$\$ \$344.00 Weekly possible. SASE for details: American Home Crafts, P.O. Box 326-AE, Suisun City, CA 94585-0326.

ATTENTION: GOVERNMENT JOBS - YOUR AREA! \$17,840 - \$69,485. Call (1) 602-838-8885, Ext. R-16649.

## INVENTIONS WANTED

INVENTORS! Your first step is important. For FREE advice, call ADVANCED PATENT SERVICES, Washington, DC. 1-800-458-0352.

## JEWELRY

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen: 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-910 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

## MAILING LISTS

NEW NAMES! Compare our guarantee! Fast delivery! Computerized labels! DCO: 1-800-992-9405. Visa/MC/AmEx.

## MISCELLANEOUS

NEED Writers/Subscribers for Quarterly Fiction Digest. Free Details. Caldwell Publishing, Box 1183, Richardson, TX 75083.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

EARN \$1,000/Thousand weekly stuffing envelopes at home. Free supplies. Start immediately. Send stamped addressed envelope. Ron Dye, 16 Lake Dr., McLoud, Oklahoma 74851.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! Bonuses! Start immediately! Enclose stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027-9983.

ASSEMBLE Products at home! For Free Information Call Toll Free: 1-800-462-1128 Ext. 90-24.

"NO NONSENSE" Way to \$500 a Day. \$1 + Sase: Frank Lombardo, 23951 Lakeshore, Euclid, OH 44123.

## MYSTERY COMPETITION

UNIQUE NATIONAL COMPETITION! Create, be, and solve mysteries. Prizes. Prep-Pack. \$3.00: Dossier's, 9852 W. Katella #327, Anaheim, California 92804.

## OF INTEREST TO ALL

HAVE A PROBLEM? ATHENA LOUISE REPLIES. Send your problem and \$1.00 to: Athena Louise, P.O. Box 29475, Los Angeles, CA 90029.

## PERSONAL

BEAUTIFUL ENGLISH SPEAKING Filipinas want men of all ages as Life Partners. Videos available: PAL, 51 Blanca, CO 81123-0051. 1-900-860-3033. \$3.00/per minute. Adults.

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people: 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

MEET USA singles by direct phone/mail. M. Fischer Club, Box 2152-V, Loves Park, IL 61110.

ATTRACTIVE Oriental wives. Free details. Enclose six 25¢ stamps. Anticipations, 3380 Sheridan, 178KB, Amherst, NY 14226.

**YOU'LL MAKE  
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—  
BY READING and ANSWERING  
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

# Classified Continued

AH-DECEMBER/90

## PERSONAL—Cont'd

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American — Mexican — Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948. (415) 897-2742.

MEET Beautiful Women! We supply photos, names, addresses! Send for Free Details! Merit, Box 74758-AE, Los Angeles, CA 90004.

SCANDINAVIA - Poland - U.S.S.R., etc. Worldwide link between sincere, unattached, well-educated men/women. Scanna Int'l, POB 4-H, Pittsford, NY 14534.

## PETS

CUSTOM designed blankets for your dog or cat. Custom Petz, 7210 Jordan Avenue, Suite D43, Canoga Park, CA 91303.

## RECIPES

DELICIOUS enchilada, burro, salsa, refried bean recipes. \$8/SASE. Recipes, P.O. Box 5802, Glendale, AZ 85312-5802.

SCRUMPTIOUS, Moist, Fruity, not too sweet. \$2. Sase: Triple Fruit Bundt, Box 202971C, Austin, TX 78729-2971.

## SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

## TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

## TOYS, GAMES & ENTERTAINMENT

**Who killed Winston Philips?**  
You could be one of 5 people to win \$1000 in the newest mystery game ever!

**Call:**  
**1-900-535-2900**  
**Program No. 310**

for complete information and more details!  
\$2.00 per minute

## For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager,  
Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.



For the first time ever you can own a complete library of Stephen King's blood-curdling best sellers in their original hardcover editions. An enduring oeuvre of evil from the 20th century's answer to Edgar Allan Poe.

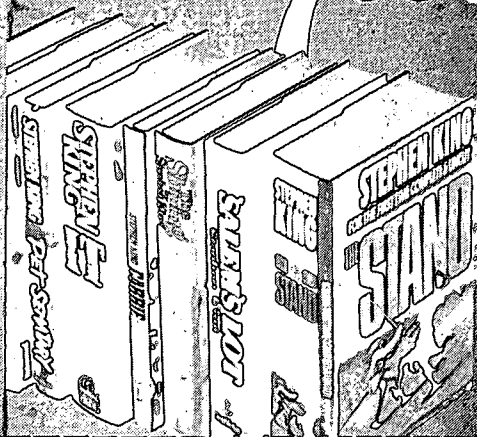
Examine King's latest, *Four Past Midnight* for 10 days, as your introduction to the Library. If you decide to keep it, we'll bill you just \$7.95 (plus shipping and handling). That's more than 50% off the publisher's price.

After that you'll receive King's other tomes of terror—from old favorites like *The Shining* to new masterworks like *The Dark Half*—one about every 7 weeks. And as a member, you'll get King's latest hardcovers as soon as they're published! Keep only the ones you want and we'll bill you just \$14.95 (plus shipping and handling). There's no obligation to buy and you can cancel at any time. You can't scare up a better deal than that.

# Presenting The STEPHEN KING LIBRARY

Get your first volume in this thrilling collection of nightmares for the shockingly low introductory price of only \$

# 7.95



## THE STEPHEN KING LIBRARY

P.O. Box 8803, Camp Hill, PA 17011-8803

**YES**, send me, as my introduction to the Stephen King Library, *Four Past Midnight* for my no-risk 10-day FREE examination. If I keep it, I pay only \$7.95, plus shipping and handling. I understand that future books in the series will arrive approximately every 7 weeks, and may be reviewed for 10 days with no obligation to buy. I will be billed a low \$14.95, plus shipping and handling, for each book I keep, and I may cancel at any time. If I return the first book, *Four Past Midnight*, my subscription will be cancelled automatically, and I'll be under no further obligation. **SK255-12-0**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print plainly)

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

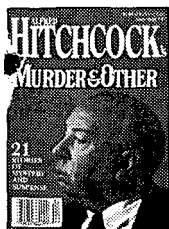
**Send no money now.** All orders subject to approval. Prices subject to change.

The Stephen King Library is a division of Book-of-the-Month Club, Inc. ©1990 BOMC

Printed in the U.S.A.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# COMPLETE YOUR COLLECTION OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK CLASSICS!

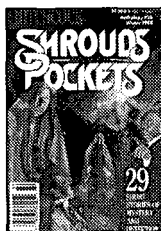


## MURDER AND OTHER MISHAPS

Want to catch a murderer? Want to catch a thief? Linger in the darkness of a turreted mansion or merge with the shadows in a wax museum. Follow the written paths of these 21 outstanding practitioners of crime on paper.

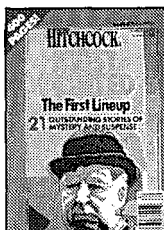
## SHROUDS AND POCKETS

The pockets of the wicked are filled by insurance fraud, house burglary, confidence games, forgery, drug smuggling and counterfeiting. 29 thrilling stories expose the desire for revenge, jealousy and greed; and remind us that shrouds have no pockets.



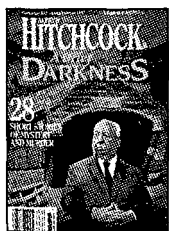
## MOST WANTED

21 of our best stories from 1980-1985, that will capture your imagination and keep you enthralled through 398 action filled pages. Hard hitting crime stories, ghost stories and tales of suspense will puzzle you until the end.



## THE SHADOW OF SILENCE

Twenty-eight stories—Twenty-eight occasions for nefarious activity by the likes of thieves and scoundrels, murderers and mischief-makers. Unsettling little surprises come in the mail, mystifying phone calls are made as well as received; corpses converse; and reality is tampered with.

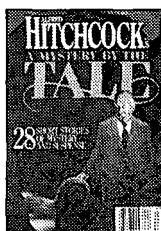


## A BRIEF DARKNESS

The stuff of which nightmare is made . . . subtly clad, so that its implications don't sink in all at once. 28 unnerving tales laced with the unexpected, clever solutions, and that Hitchcock humor.

## A MYSTERY BY THE TALE

Twenty-eight great tales that will thrill, chill, divert, beguile, pique, enthrall, entertain, absorb, intrigue, galvanize, disquiet, startle, titillate, provoke, electrify, stimulate, excite, arrest, engage, deceive, seize, mystify and baffle you.



Make your check or money order payable to **ALFRED HITCHCOCK ANTHOLOGIES**. Please be sure to enclose the exact amount.

Mail to: **ALFRED HITCHCOCK ANTHOLOGIES**  
P.O. Box 40 HPKD-7  
Vernon, NJ 07462

Please include your name and address.

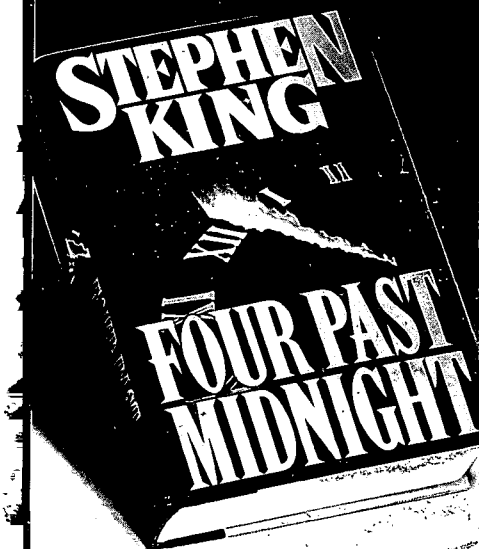
- #27 MURDER & OTHER MISHAPS (\$4.50)
- #26 SHROUDS AND POCKETS (\$4.50)
- #25 MOST WANTED (\$4.50)
- #24 THE SHADOW OF SILENCE (\$4.50)
- #23 A BRIEF DARKNESS (\$4.50)
- #22 A MYSTERY BY THE TALE (\$4.50)
- #21 WORDS OF PREY (\$4.50)
- #19 GRAVE SUSPICIONS (\$3.50)
- #18 CRIME WATCH (\$3.50)
- #17 MORTAL ERRORS (\$3.50)
- #16 A CHOICE OF EVILS (\$3.50)
- #15 BORROWERS OF THE NIGHT (\$3.50)
- #13 DEATHREACH (\$3.50)



# DOM OF TERROR

Get my latest hardcover,  
best seller \$ **7.95**  
for only

with your membership in the  
Stephen King Library



What's scarier than a new Stephen King thriller? Four of them—each one more suspenseful, more terrifying than the one before. The novels of *Four Past Midnight* are just waiting to take you to a place where, as King says in his introduction, “the walls have eyes and the trees have ears and something *really* unpleasant is trying to find its way out of the attic and downstairs...”